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# The New York Review of Science Fiction

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## Robert Killheffer Striking a Balance:

Robert Silverberg's *Lord of Darkness, Dying Inside* and Others

"The English have a great hunger for desert places. . . . No Arab loves the desert. We love water, and green trees."

—Alec Guinness as Prince Feisal, in  
David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*

### I. Robert Silverberg and the Historical Novel

*Dying Inside* is widely thought of as Robert Silverberg's best book, the pinnacle of a long and distinguished career. Some have called it "the best science fiction novel ever written" (Martin H. Greenberg and Charles Waugh, *Hollywood Unravel* [Taplinger Publishing Co., 1982], p. 232). Undoubtedly it is a great book, deeply moving, powerfully written and rich in its portrayal of its tragic central character, David Selig, but I think nevertheless of another book as Silverberg's best—his unjustly unrecognized epic historical novel, *Lord of Darkness*.

*Lord of Darkness* is a rousing adventure story, a tale of the strange far-off lands of Africa that will please anyone with fond memories of H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. There's plenty of action and sex, and a strong grounding in real history, which makes the book that much more interesting. Silverberg has taken as the basis for his novel the "abridged and apparently garbled version" that has come down to us of the memoir of Andrew Battell, an actual Elizabethan-era Englishman who had twenty years of adventures in Africa at the end of the sixteenth century. Haggard and many other writers have written with the conceit that their adventure yarns were real, found as a handwritten diary in the attic or a manuscript in a sea-borne bottle. Silverberg's is, at least in outline, truly historical, and the excitement of the imagination that falsified historicity can produce in other novels is doubled and tripled here. I, in fact, went so far as to find the published memoir at the public library, so great was my interest.

I've read a good many historical novels, set in places as diverse as ancient Rome and colonial Virginia, and I've never read one that so gracefully and successfully uses language to create and enhance an antiquated flavor. Silverberg writes with a lucid and very readable style that manages to convey the sense of sixteenth-century English, without losing clarity or elegance. His prose is never stilted or choppy, as is often the case when this sort of device is attempted. Carefully choosing from his broad vocabulary, deftly handling his inversions of sentence structure, and seasoning the text judiciously with archaic terms and the occasional "th" verb ending, Silverberg has produced a smooth and convincing sense of antiquity in the book.

Equally effective is his employment and incorporation of history in the novel. Comparing *Lord of Darkness* to its memoir source, I found that Silverberg's version (not surprisingly) was considerably different from the known historical facts. The memoir is shorter and less involved than the novel. Silverberg has created new characters and filled out those of people mentioned only as names in Battell's account.

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## In this issue

Robert Killheffer ventures into the darkest heart of Robert Silverberg's fiction  
Alexei and Cory Panshin discuss the writers in John W. Campbell's stable during the Golden Age  
Michael Swanwick visits Robin's Book Store on Thirteenth Street

Sf writers respond to Kathryn Cramer's statistical analysis of science fiction's younger generation  
*Not to overlook reviews, letters, bibliographies, and more of what makes science fiction worth our while*

## Alexei and Cory Panshin Universal Principles of Operation from *The World Beyond the Hill* (Part II of III)

Some measure of the scope of science fiction as conceived by John Campbell—and also the reason that this conception was much his own private belief—may be glimpsed in a highly revealing incident that happened shortly before Campbell's death in 1971. Writer Harry Harrison remembers it like this:

His sense of humor was of the roguish kind and many of his declarations and editorials were designed to provoke cries of rage from his readers. Characteristic is a statement he made just a few months before he died. There was a group of us and the talk came around to literature and the place of science fiction in the greater whole of English letters. It was pointed out that some enthusiastic aggrandizers of SF stand on the barricades and declare that someday, due to innate superiority, the short story and the novel will be engulfed by science fiction and become part of it. Others, perhaps more realistically, say that SF is one specialized part of the whole of literature. But not John Campbell! With a sweep of one great hand he dismissed these feeble arguments, then spread his arms wide. "This is science fiction," he said, from open-armed fingertip to fingertip. "It takes in all time, from before the universe was born, through the formation of stars and planets, on through their destruction and forward to the heat death of the universe. And after." His hands came together so that his index fingers delineated a very tiny measure of space. "This is English literature, the most microscopic fraction of the whole."

We have to take this statement seriously. For, even as Harrison suggests that Campbell must have been only foolin', he also offhand-

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**"You Have But  
To Listen,  
And Let  
The Mind  
Fly Free..."**

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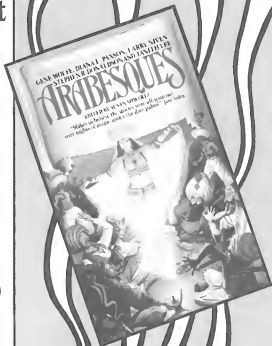
Edited by Susan Schwartz

Further tales of the  
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edly acknowledges that here in Campbell's assertion lies the essence of the Golden Age.

But what should be important for us to note is that as late as 1971, a crowd of science fiction writers—men who had grown up under the influence and direction of John Campbell, men who dealt with SF on a regular basis—could still choose to imagine that his personal concept of science fiction was just a joke, another of Campbell's typical roguish provocations. From this, we may judge just how truly far ahead of his time, how invisibly powerful, and how solitary was a John Campbell armed with these convictions in 1936, in the moment when he first set out to bring change to science fiction.

But yet, even more fundamental than Campbell's conception of the scope and role of science fiction was the vision of the unity and coherence of the universe that formed the foundation for this conception. We may see something of this vision peeking through in Campbell's assertion that science fiction takes in all time, from before the universe was born until its death—and then after.

It is not just that no one had previously thought about science fiction in this way. No one had previously thought about the *physical universe* in this way—as a discrete event with a limited life span, a before and an after, which humanity might be superior to.

All through the Technological Age, the material universe had presented a demonic appearance. It was the vast Unknown, remote, incomprehensible and terrifying. It was the great enemy of man, his ultimate executioner.

But then, in the last days of the Age of Technology there was a turn of the cosmic kaleidoscope, and all of a sudden science-minded visionaries throughout the Western world were permitted to view the universe in a completely new light. To John Campbell, to the inventor and futurist R. Buckminster Fuller, to the men who would conceive cybernetics and games theory and systems theory, and to a good many others to a greater or lesser degree, it suddenly came to seem apparent that the immensity and complexity displayed by the material universe must be only superficial appearance.

Beneath the surface of immaterial materiality, interconnecting it

and holding it together, there must be a relatively small number of fundamental general principles. And everything in the universe—even life, even consciousness—was ultimately to be defined and controlled by these basic rules of nature.

We may understand this vision as the scientific and philosophical variant of the new understanding that was concurrently finding its social expression in the form of democratic pluralism: These universal principles were not respecters of person. They were not reserved for the private use of those born to privilege. They were radically democratic, applying to all and accessible to all.

It appeared that for anyone who was prepared to seek for them, these general principles of relationship and operation would not prove impossible to discover. John Campbell would express it this way in one of his early editorials: "I have heard it said that Nature will give a truthful answer to any intelligent question properly asked. . . . The trick in getting the oracle of Nature to answer is to ask intelligent questions properly."

Or, as he would say elsewhere: "Nature is a blabbermouth."

The promise implicit in this new scientific vision was that if men would just get on with their proper business of achieving mastery over the fundamental laws of existence, then there was no limit to potential human power, and no need for mankind to fear the universe.

In Buckminster Fuller's case, this new vision had come upon him in 1927, in a moment when he was on the point of drowning himself in Lake Michigan. His beloved daughter had died on her fourth birthday, his business career was in shambles, and he was filled with despair at the meaninglessness of his existence. But then, in this totally hopeless moment, he was given a sudden glimmering of the order and beauty underlying incomprehensibility. Fuller immediately abandoned his attempt at suicide and dedicated himself to a new life work. As he would later put it: "I made a bargain with myself that I'd discover the principles operative in the universe and turn them over to my fellow men."

Even though John Campbell did not need to be pushed to the brink of suicide in order to arrive at his version of this vision, nonetheless, by his own route and in his own time, he had come to make a very similar

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compact with himself. Except that Campbell's particular dedication was to discover the operating principles of the universe—and then to turn them over to his fellow men in the form of science fiction stories.

It was Campbell's grasp of the new scientific vision and his personal dedication to seeing the vision fulfilled that account finally for his great edge as an editor. He was a man with a job to do, in precisely the right place at just the right moment to see it done.

To a degree that no other SF editor could possibly match, Campbell knew what his business was. And the series of changes that he made in *Asiomatic*, the writers he chose to favor, the scientific news and paradoxes and insights that he stimulated them with, the content of the stories he picked to publish and the nature of the story revisions he insisted upon—all of these are to be explained by John Campbell's determination to place human hands on the controls of the universe.

That was the real nature of his work. And his means of seeing the work accomplished was "modern science fiction," Campbellian science fiction, SF altered in such a way as to proclaim and to represent and to apply the new vision of underlying universal operating principles.

Modern science fiction was the answer that Campbell had so painstakingly worked out in the course of the Thirties to the early Twentieth Century dilemmas—that unshakable nightmare that said no matter what mankind might do or how far it might go, ultimately, inevitably, it must still be destroyed and eliminated by the universe. Campbell's "mutations" in *Asiomatic*, taken in sum, offered an alternate picture of man in the universe—a whole new scenario. The story they told was this:

*Things hang together. The universe is not to be feared; it will respond only if it is asked the right questions. The facts are the key, but the facts must be determined. The future may be anticipated. Human evolution is possible. The way to proceed is through the acceptance of change. The method is science and engineering applied with reason and imagination. The ultimate end is human dominion over the universe.*

To write modern science fiction for John Campbell, all that would be necessary would be to take one or more of these fundamental tenets and give them expression in story form.

But before any modern science fiction stories had actually been written, their outline was already visible in the form and fabric of the 1938 *Asiomatic*. In a very real sense, the first and best example of modern science fiction—the template, the basic model—would be the Campbell *Asiomatic* itself.

The new construction of reality was expressed in every possible way by the new *Asiomatic*. It was demonstrated, it was pictured, it was assumed, it was implied.

Campbell might say about the change in title design: "The new cover lettering . . . represents an effort to bring the style of type used, more into conformation with the type of material appearing in the magazine; a modern, simple type-face, clean-cut and definite."

And the implication was that Campbell wanted material that was modern, simple, clean-cut and definite. And also that all parts and elements of *Asiomatic* were a reflection of the whole.

Campbell might even state some portion of his credo loud and plain, as when he declared editorially, "The old order not only does change, but *must* change," even as he turned *Asiomatic* inside out.

But nowhere did Campbell state the whole of his vision as explicitly as we have just tried to do. That was because the dearest thing to a complete statement of Campbell's new ordering of things was the magazine itself.

But that was part of the message, too. *Things hang together*, said *Asiomatic*.

Anywhere at all that you might look in the magazine would be some fragment or indication of the new whole. "The An Lab"—a new department of performance analysis. "In Times to Come"—a new department of prophecy. Cover paintings that portrayed man poking his nose into the far corners of the real Solar System. And—everywhere and always—change, change, change.

And even so, a leap of understanding would be required to grasp that what was being indicated was not just one thing and another, but different aspects of a dynamic new whole.

Perhaps as close as Campbell came to stating the essence of his belief directly was in this comment in the March 1938 editorial that

accompanied the change in title from *Asiomatic Stories* to *Asiomatic Science-Fiction*:

"We presuppose, in these stories, two things: that there is yet to be learned infinitely more than is now known, and that Man can learn it."

What a deceptively simple thing to say, now that it was said—that men can always learn whatever it is that they need to know! But to be able to say this and believe it, it was necessary first to accept that the universe, however unknown it might be, is not alien, hostile and incomprehensible; that necessary information will always be there when needed; that learning and change are always a human possibility; and that things do hang together.

In the continuing Twentieth Century debate between the forecasters of human glory and the criers of human doom, this was the implicit answer of the optimist H. G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, E. E. Smith and John Campbell—the lineage of emergent modern science fiction—to the pessimist Wells, Bertrand Russell, H. P. Lovecraft, Olaf Stapledon and the Europeans. But only now, at last, able to be given utterance.

Campbell's timing was just right. There proved to be a body of readers waiting who had enough sense of the new vision to be able to put together all the bits and pieces of his message, to make a whole of it, and to believe in it.

The readers of *Asiomatic* understood that *Asiomatic* was now a works project, an experimental laboratory, an open college dedicated to the creation of modern science fiction, and they leaped to support Campbell. They eagerly rated stories for him. They argued and debated his questions in the letter column. Above all, they applauded the changes that he was making and yearned for more.

And all of this was before much in the way of actual modern science fiction even existed. It would not be too far off the mark to say that Campbell spent his first year as editor in preparing readers to understand and accept modern science fiction and in training writers to write it.

What is usually reckoned the essential early example of modern science fiction was not published until the August 1938 issue, almost a year after Campbell became editor of *Asiomatic*. This was a long novelet entitled "Who Goes There?" and its author was John Campbell's alter ego, Don Stuart.

This pivotal story was specifically directed to the question of whether men must fear the difference of the un-Earthly, or whether they might make the regularity and reliability of the universe their particular tool and ally.

In "Who Goes There?" an American polar expedition has discovered a spaceship and an alien being that have been frozen in the ice of Antarctica for twenty million years. The spaceship has been accidentally destroyed, but the scientists have carried the alien back to camp in a block of ice with the intention of examining it.

The very appearance of the alien is upsetting. It is a hideous Lovecraftian being, blue-skinned, red-eyed and obviously malevolent. Strong men retch and retreat at the sight of it, even envenomed in a chunk of ice.

"Three mad, hate-filled eyes blazed up with a living fire, bright as fresh-spilled blood, from a face ringed with a writhing, loathsome nest of worms, blue, mobile worms that crawled where hair should grow—"

And its behavior is even more frightening. This nightmare-inducing creature does not merely thaw out and then begin to decay in the normal manner. Instead, after twenty million years in cold storage, it comes back to life! What is more, it proves to be a shape-changing, telepathic monster that can take over the protoplasm of any living creature—be it a dog, a cow, a bird or a man—and convert it into its own kind while still retaining the capabilities and appearance of the original.

In short, here, just as in Campbell's earlier story, "The Brain Stealers of Mars" (*Thrilling Wonder*, Dec 1936), human beings are confronted by the prospect of shape-shifting mind readers. But, what in the earlier story was only a half-comic question of distinguishing a pair of human originals from a host of Martian imitators, in "Who Goes There?" becomes the wholly urgent need to prevent a monstrous alien from escaping the Antarctic and taking over the world.

What a completely horrifying prospect!

And yet, the emphasis in "Who Goes There?" is not upon horror or excitement, as it is in the two Hollywood movies that would be made

from Campbell's story—*The Thing* (1951) and *The Thing* (1982). If thrills had been Campbell's object, then almost certainly he would have chosen to start his story at an earlier moment than he does. Say—as a bronze ice ax chips into something and breaks off, and an American scientist suddenly finds himself staring into the three glowing red eyes of a frozen snake-haired alien. Or as a magnesium spaceship suddenly catches fire, and sparks and burns away to nothing beneath the polar ice.

But action and emotion are not the heart of "Who Goes There?" Horror and excitement in sufficient measure may be used to carry the story along, but they aren't what Campbell is after. In fact, in a very real sense, it is horror and excitement that the characters of the story are called upon to overcome if they are to perceive their situation clearly and deal with it effectively.

And so it is that "Who Goes There?" does not open with the high thrills of the discovery of the creature and the destruction of the alien spaceship. Rather, it opens back at base camp with all the members of the expedition gathered to hear a chalk talk summary of what has been found.

Indeed, the very first thing the story offers is a bracing whiff of the atmosphere of the camp:

"The place stank. A queer, mingled stench that only the ice-buried cabins of an Antarctic camp knew, compounded of reeking human sweat, and the heavy, fish-ol' stench of melted seal blubber."

This is just the beginning. On the litany of reeks and stenches continues: liniment, wet furs, burnt cooking fat, dogs, machine oil, harness dressing—and the queer, neck-ruffing taint of thawing alien. (There it is in the background, underneath a tarp, dripping away.)

No place described in earlier science fiction on ever stank like this! But it is precisely this overwhelming atmosphere of pervasive, inescapable specificity—of smelly feet and seal blubber—that establishes a context in which naked fact and universal principle may plausibly rule.

The true emphasis in "Who Goes There?"—like much of Campbellian science fiction—is on the definition and solution of a problem. And the problem set forth in this initial story of modern science fiction is a fundamental one:

The creature from another world is strange, terrifying, and immensely powerful. But is it different in essence from what we know, or is it only different in kind?

Here is the very significant reaction of the expedition's doctor when he is first told that the monster has come back to life and escaped:

"Copper stared blankly. 'It wasn't—Earthly,' he sighed suddenly. 'I—I guess Earthly laws don't apply.'"

With this response, Campbell precisely catches the basic elements of the "literature of cosmic fear" described by H. P. Lovecraft in his classic 1927 essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*:

A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.

This is the Techno Age attitude toward the wider universe at its most timorous—laid down as an aesthetic requirement!

But in "Who Goes There?" John Campbell has raised his demon of unplumbed space not to confirm us in our habitual cosmic fear, but rather with the intention of resolving the problem of this alien monster using the new general principles of relationship and operation. Not mere Earthly laws—which perhaps might not apply to demonic creatures from another star—but Universal Law, which surely does.

As Blair, the biologist of the expedition, says, very shortly before he goes mad and has to be placed in isolation:

"This isn't wildly beyond what we already know. It's just a modification we haven't seen before. It's as natural, as logical, as any other manifestation of life. It obeys exactly the same laws."

What a radical new idea this was—that the biology and behavior of even an alien might be governed by laws as simple and manipulable

as those of classical physics! And yet, this becomes the premise that the members of the expedition proceed upon. They set out to test scientifically who is a monster and who is not.

What is more, in "Who Goes There?" it is assumed that all true human beings will naturally accept the appropriateness and efficiency of scientific testing. Indeed, the members of the human expedition are completely confident that those monsters masquerading as men will raise no objections to the principle of testing because anything less than complete assent to the power of science would be a dead giveaway of their non-humanity.

However, the first test that the American scientists devise is not a success. Like the tests in "The Brain Stealers of Mars"—which were the presumed inability of the Martians either to copy human muscles well enough to sneeze, or to duplicate an acquired human immunity to tetanus—it is an Earth-minded test. The scientists immunize one of their sled dogs with the blood from two men. Their expectation is that the blood from any monster pretending to be human will be revealed as something other-than-human under laboratory examination.

But the monster proves to have outmaneuvered them. The dog reacts to human blood—but also to monster blood. Not only is the test hopelessly compromised, but also it is certain that one of the two apparent humans who originally contributed blood must actually be an alien.

In this traumatic moment, some of the members of the party are driven over the edge into madness, religious hysteria and murder. But others keep their balance. They devise a new and more effective test—this time not a test of human genuineness, but rather a direct test of alien difference. It employs a universal principle—the law of self-preservation—in such a way as to make the monster's own superiority give it away:

Does each part of the monster have independent life and crave to preserve it? Then take a sample of blood from each man and touch it with a hot wire. If it screams and tries to escape, it must be monster blood.

This scientific trial-by-fire proves just the thing, and one by one, fifteen human-imitating monsters are duly identified and eliminated. And the last of these is Blair, the "mad" biologist. When he is discovered, it is with two homemade inventions—anti-gravity and atomic power.

If he had survived only a few more minutes, the world would have been his for the taking. As it is, human beings have been left with a couple of neat bonuses.

There are a number of unexamined ambiguities within this pivotal story. Not the least of these is that Dr. Copper, who could only stare blankly and suggest the Lovecraftian otherness of the creature, is one of those who proves to be a genuine human being, while Blair the biologist, who first proposed that the alien must be a natural being subject to the same laws as any other manifestation of life, turns out to be a monster. How very odd it is that the creature should be the one to propose the basis for its own destruction!

In fact, the respect that the monsters volunteer for the new rule of scientific testing of universal principle is nothing short of remarkable. Despite their large numbers, common nature, and telepathic powers, the false humans completely eschew the possibility of joint resistance. They defeatly take their turn in line to be tested and then electrocuted or ripped to shreds. We may be forgiven for concluding that if these malevolent monsters tamely bow down and worship the new vision of universal principle, it is because it is their vision, too.

"Who Goes There?" would prove to be the most influential SF story since Stanley Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey." In effect, it was highly visible public demonstration, a sign to all who could see, that John Campbell was out to turn science fiction into something new.

But this electrifying story would be almost the last piece of fiction John Campbell would write. In the coming months, he would publish two more stories as John W. Campbell, Jr., and (two as Don A. Stuart, but after the middle of 1939, when he wrote a Stuart short novel to fill a hole in *Unknown*, he would cease to produce fiction).

The explanation usually given for this is that Campbell was called in by his superiors at Street & Smith and flatly told to stop writing fiction and stick to his editing—and that Campbell valued his pay check enough to obey.

But while there may be a degree of truth to this story, it doesn't

sound very much like John Campbell, a man who was rarely one to do anything that he didn't wish to do. If Campbell was prepared to give up his science fiction writing, it just may have been because he had finally figured out how to be an editor and get other people to do the writing for him. At least, Isaac Asimov tells us:

I once asked him, years ago (with all the puzzlement of a compulsive writer who can imagine no other way of life), how he could possibly have borne to leave his writing career and become an editor. I had almost said merely an editor. He smiled (he knew me) and said, "Isaac, when I write, I write only my own stories. As editor, I write the stories that a hundred people write."

The problem in creating modern science fiction would be to find a hundred writers with some sense of the new vision, or a willingness and ability to pick it up, and to get rid of the rest. Along with the changes he made in the magazine, Campbell cleaned house at *Asiomatic* through 1938 and 1939. He swept out the debris of the Technological Age. He got rid of stories of mushy occultism, unfounded fancy and cosmic fear. He picked and chose among the established writers of science fiction, discarding all those who could not play by the new rules.

E. E. Smith, of course, was one established writer acceptable to Campbell. His first Lensman novel, *Galactic Patrol*, had just begun serialization as Campbell became editor of *Asiomatic*. This was the most grandly scaled science fiction story yet, the climax of all Smith's efforts since *The Skylark of Space*, and its very presence in the pages of *Asiomatic* gave Campbell's editorial career the strongest possible initial boost.

Even though Doc Smith would never exactly be a writer of modern science fiction, John Campbell would continue to publish Lensman novels through the next ten years. Once more, Smith would be something like Jules Verne—a founding father who continued to work on into an era that was not his own.

But even so, there would be good reasons aplenty for Campbell to give Smith's great epic housework in the pages of *Asiomatic*. There was a moral confidence and an imaginative breadth to the Lensman stories that modern science fiction—for all its many special qualities and virtues—would simply never be able to equal. And indeed, even though during the Forties the Lensman series might sometimes seem a side issue, a relic, a leftover from an earlier era of SF, it would eventually prove to be the conceptual foundation upon which the latter-day Campbellian science fiction of the Fifties and Sixties would come to be erected.

But Campbell's other early inspiration, Edmond Hamilton, would not fare so well with him. Hamilton would appear in the Campbell *Asiomatic* just once at the end of 1938, and then never again.

It happened this way: Campbell and Hamilton had been fellow members of a New York area SF writers circle. After he became editor, Campbell asked most of the writers he knew, including Hamilton, to contribute stories to his magazine. And Hamilton was glad to dash one off for him.

But then Campbell did the Campbellish thing. He pointed out flaws in the story and asked for a rewrite. Ed Hamilton was an old pro accustomed to turning out first-draft copy, to repeating his plots, and to selling everything that he wrote. So he was quite taken aback by this request. He fixed the story, but he didn't send any more to Campbell.

In later years, Hamilton would say in explanation: "The trouble was that I was trying to make a living writing s-f. John had very meticulous standards, and I would not be able to sell enough of his s-f to live on. I sometimes regret I didn't stay with John. With his help I could have become a lot better s-f writer."

By contrast, a writer who was not attempting to make a living from SF alone and who was able to make the stretch to meet Campbell's strictures might well perceive his appointment as editor as an unprecedented opportunity to do work of a kind and quality previous impossible. One such writer was newspaperman Clifford D. Simak. In the early Thirties, he had written "The World of the Red Sun" and several other science fiction stories, but after the failure of the Clayton *Asiomatic*, he had turned away from SF.

But when he learned that John Campbell had become editor of

*Asiomatic*, his interest was revived. Simak told his wife that Campbell would want a new kind of SF, and that he was confident that he would be able to satisfy Campbell's requirements—both of which proved to be true. Writing science fiction strictly as a sideline, Simak would contribute stories to Campbell for the next twenty-five years.

But it was not sufficient for Campbell to simply sort through the established writers of science fiction in search of those capable of working with him. Too few of the established writers of science fiction were in tune with the new scientific vision, and even fewer were prepared to be taken over the jumps by young John Campbell.

To write his new science fiction, Campbell had to draft, discover and invent a whole new set of writers. Of all the many labors that he performed as he strove to bring modern science fiction into being, this gathering and training of new writers would be by far the most significant.

Campbell was at his very best in pursuit of these unknown persons capable of presenting the new vision for him. He was subtle, observant, patient, persistent, and infinitely resourceful. And even so, one of the first writers he found was initially forced upon him against his will.

At the very outset of Campbell's editing career, in that brief moment when he was still expressing a measure of uncertainty about filling the pages of a monthly magazine with new stories, his superiors at Street & Smith thought to provide him with an insurance policy. They called in a couple of top pulp adventure writers—reliable professional yarnspinners—and told Campbell to accept any work they cared to submit to him.

Campbell protested this vigorously. Science fiction was fundamentally different from other pulp literature. It wasn't just to be cranked out by the yard. What is more, to pay these guys his top rates for anything and everything they wrote would cut the heart right out of his budget. He didn't want to do it. But F. Orin Tremaine was one person he would heed, and when Tremaine told him to do it, he did it.

Campbell was already familiar with one of the writers imposed upon him, Arthur J. Burks. Burks actually had some previous science fiction writing experience, including stories published in the Clayton *Asiomatic*. And one way or another, he and Campbell did accommodate themselves to each other to the tune of one so-so novel and a series of mild, rationalized space opera stories. But after only one year and half-a-dozen stories—and the departure of F. Orin Tremaine from Street & Smith—Burks would be gone from the pages of *Asiomatic*, swept out in Campbell's great spring housecleaning.

But the other writer who had been forced on Campbell would serve as a longer-term asset—of a kind. This was L. Ron Hubbard, who is best known for his later career as the founder of the religion/mind-control system Scientology.

This big redheaded people-charmer was born in Tilden, Nebraska on March 13, 1911. Probably. Possibly. With Hubbard it is hard to know exactly where the real truth lies since his greatest continuing pleasure in life was in telling stretchers, striking poses, and seeing just how much falsity he could get other people to swallow. In a revealing moment, he once said:

"Now you say you have to be absolutely truthful. Sincerity is the main thing, and truthfulness is the main thing, and don't lie to anybody . . . and you'll get ahead. Brother you sure will. You'll get ahead right on that cycle of action, right toward zero! . . . It's a trap not being able to prevaricate . . ."

"You say, 'You know, I was down with the other day and there's this Yellow Taxi there, and I started to step into this Yellow Taxi, and I'll be a son of a gun if there wasn't a big ape sitting in the back smoking a cigar. And I closed the door and walked on down the street.'"

"This makes life more colorful."

Hubbard's usual public pretense at the time that he and Campbell met was that he was a globe-trotting explorer who paused from time to time between adventures to catch his breath and turn out pulp stories. In this, he would be imitating earlier writers of pulp adventure who may or may not have had a better claim to the pose.

In fact, however, the only real accomplishment of this college dropout had been to sell his dreams of adventure to others in story form. And when he blew into town with his latest tale of being shipwrecked

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*Computer's Computer Visions* by Ralph Roberts

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*Information Anxiety* by Richard Saul Wurman

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While you're at it, subscribe to *Spy*. The only surefire antidote to *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Hilarious because it takes no prisoners.

in the Aleutians and forced to survive on whale meat and seaweed, or whatever, the actual fact was that he was living in the state of Washington with a wife and son, either attempting to psych himself up to write or else pounding out stories at red-hot speed.

At the times when he was able to write, Hubbard would slap down first-draft copy onto a long roll of typing paper, not wishing to be slowed down or have his mood broken by having to remove one sheet of paper and replace it with another. And when his stories were finished, he would have his wife check them over and mail them out, but he wouldn't necessarily read them himself after they had passed through his typewriter.

The result of these habits was stories which moved along pell-mell, with a certain verve and charm and superficial plausibility, but which ultimately didn't add up to much. They were good enough to get by, but they weren't original or substantial work.

For the claim that Hubbard (and Burks) were initially forced upon Campbell over the editor's protest, we have only the word of this dedicated toyer with the truth. So take warning that the tale is not completely to be relied upon.

What makes it seem possible; however, is that Hubbard had no previous background at all in writing science fiction, or even in reading it. He was in no way a natural writer for John Campbell to pick out and cultivate on his own. Not only did Campbell take him on as a writer, however, but it is clear that at the outset the editor was bowled over by Hubbard's personal flash and dazzle. He went out of his way to find niches for this operator within his magazine and to work out grounds for him to write SF.

That took a certain amount of discussion and negotiation. The fact is that Hubbard had no more than a glancing acquaintance with most contemporary science. He'd lingered in engineering school only long enough to pick up the talk. He had read some fantasy—*The Arabian*

*Nights* and Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*. He'd read quite a bit of occult literature. And he had an interest in the hidden powers of the mind.

That was where he and Campbell found their first common ground. Hubbard began writing for *Amazing* with rationalized stories of wild mental talents—a short story, "The Dangerous Dimension" (July 1938), followed by the serial novel, *The Tramp* (Sept-Nov 1938).

And the next year, when Campbell started *Unknown*, he would even set aside a special preserve for Hubbard—stories of contemporary men involved with alternate worlds based on *The Arabian Nights*. The editor would write to Hubbard:

I'm damn glad you'll be with us on the Arabian Nights stuff—and you needn't worry about having it yours. I've been telling a few of the boys to read Washington Irving as an example of pure fantasy and complete acceptance of magic, enchantment, et cetera, and adding that they aren't to do Arabian Nights because the field is preempted by you. It's been held open for you.

By whatever means it was arranged, the open door for Hubbard's stories at *Amazing* and *Unknown* represented a considerable opportunity for him. For perhaps the only time in a life that was generally misspent, Hubbard's true nature, interests, knowledge and gifts coincided with the chance to do work with an aspect of genuine creativity, instead of his usual fakery.

Hubbard would never be one of John Campbell's special pupils or central innovators. But during the time before he entered the Navy during World War II, Hubbard would be involved enough and reliable enough to serve as a steady hack writer for Campbell. He would sell the

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editor eleven novels and twenty-two shorter stories, published under his own name and three pseudonyms.

This was good-but work, turned out far too fast, often flat and untranscendent, usually a little rickety, but generally good enough to serve. And sometimes, in a few rare conceptions and occasional brilliant moments, it was more than that.

But L. Ron Hubbard was not at all the usual Campbell writer. Far more typically, the writers that Campbell enlisted to produce the stories he needed were amateurs with some background in science and a long history of reading SF.

Indeed, what is truly remarkable, considering that Campbell was no populist and no social wiz, is the sheer range of people that he attracted or convinced to write for him. The editor was one of those who followed H. G. Wells in believing that the old elite of birth should be replaced by a new and more effective elite—an elite of competence. For Campbell, the value of democratic pluralism was that it allowed competence the opportunity to display itself.

What it took to get along with Campbell was a display of the hallmarks of competence—an eagerness to work, a willingness to question, a determination to think and to learn. In his usual state of high editorial dedication, Campbell would never pause to worry about non-essentials like age or reputation or ethnic background. He would work with anyone in whom he spied even the faintest glimmering of real understanding.

This is all the more important to note because on the ordinary emotional level, Campbell was not completely free of the common prejudices of the period and class in which he was raised. He might, for instance, state flatly that it would be better for all concerned if the United States marched down to Latin America and took the place over. And—coming as he did from an earlier era in which SF writers were *always* named something like Wells, Burroughs, Merritt, Smith, Hamilton . . . or Campbell—he was even capable of suggesting to several of his more exotically named writers that they might consider the possibility of adopting Anglo-Saxon or Scottish pen names, since such names were bound to ring better in the reader's ear.

But that was as far as it went. As an editor, Campbell was usually able to keep his latent cultural prejudices from interfering with his higher aims. What truly mattered to him—far more than any White-Male-Scottish-American chauvinism—was that a writer be resilient enough, bright enough and capable enough to put up with his criticisms, his arguments and lectures, and his eternal testing and prodding—and then repay him for his trouble and effort by coming back to him with stories that were *new*.

If a writer could do that, Campbell didn't care what his origins might be. In his eyes, all true makers of science fiction were of one kind—above and beyond questions of mere ethnicity. And, in actual practice, the contents page of the Golden Age *Asimov* would display a flowering rainbow of unusual surnames, their sheer variety and their aura of difference helping to contribute to the unique appeal of the magazine.

The ultimate example of Campbell's ability to exercise tolerance and patience in the name of science fiction with a person from a completely different background than himself may be seen in his treatment of one young would-be writer, an 18-year-old Jewish immigrant named Isaac Asimov.

In June 1938, Isaac Asimov made the trek from his father's little neighborhood candy store in Brooklyn to Campbell's office in lower Manhattan. He was wearing his second-best suit and carrying his first attempt at an SF story, a manuscript entitled "Cosmic Corkscrew." What a thoroughly unprepossessing character this Asimov was—a loud, bright, pimple-faced kid, particularly obnoxious when nervous, as he was at this moment of first encounter.

Asimov was born in Russia at the beginning of 1920, and then raised in the close confines of a series of Brooklyn candy stores. When he wasn't studying, eating or sleeping, he was working in the family store. It was there that he had discovered magazine science fiction at the age of nine. He was certainly precocious—at 18 already at the end of his junior year as a premed student at Columbia—but all that he knew of the world was narrow little candy stores, books, school and science fiction.

Nonetheless, when Asimov showed up unannounced at Street & 8 The New York Review of Science Fiction

Smith, Campbell had the outer secretary send him back. Asimov was a science fiction fan, and Campbell recognized his name.

Altogether, Campbell devoted more than two hours of working time to this youngster. He soothed Asimov's jitters by showing him that he had a letter printed in each of the next two issues of *Asimov*. He told Asimov about the beginnings of his own writing career. He showed him "Who Goes There?", also just about to see publication. And he promised the boy that he would give "Cosmic Corkscrew" prompt and complete attention.

And, in fact, he did. He read "Cosmic Corkscrew" overnight—and rejected it immediately. But not without a thoughtful two-page letter of comment.

By contrast, when Asimov read Campbell's story "Who Goes There?", it was with "delight mingled with despair." He recognized that the story presented a challenge to all would-be writers of science fiction.

But he was ready to accept that challenge. It didn't matter to him that his first story had been rejected. John Campbell had treated him and his writing with respect. More than that, Asimov had caught something crucial from Campbell—a spirit of enthusiasm and a sense of new possibility. Asimov desired no happier fate than to be allowed to write another science fiction story that John Campbell could see fit to publish.

Month after month, Asimov would journey to Campbell's office with a new story in hand, not yet sure precisely what was required, but always hoping that he might have come closer to the mark this time. And month after month, Campbell would interrupt his work to give Asimov personal attention, read his latest story, and then promptly reject it.

At last, however, there came the wonderful day when Campbell perceived a faint possibility buried in an Asimov manuscript—the suggestion of possible social resistance to space travel. He called Asimov back to his office only one week after his usual monthly visit and told him to rewrite this latest effort putting social reaction at the center. Asimov did, and Campbell bought it, publishing it under the title "Trends" in the July 1939 *Asimov*.

Asimov would soon find himself adopted as John Campbell's most favored pupil. And eventually, after two or three years of now-weekly visits, Asimov would justify Campbell's faith in him by assuming a place as one of his most central innovators.

But who except John Campbell would ever have thought to see a potential giant of science fiction in the strange and hapless adolescent who first entered Campbell's office clutching an unprintable story called "Cosmic Corkscrew"? Even Asimov himself couldn't help but wonder about this:

Many years later I asked Campbell (with whom I had by then grown to be on the closest terms) why he had bothered with me at all, since that first story was surely utterly impossible.

"It was," he said frankly, for he never flattered. "On the other hand, I saw something in you. You were eager and you listened and I knew you wouldn't quit no matter how many rejections I handed you. As long as you were willing to work hard at improving, I was willing to work with you."

That was John. I wasn't the only writer, whether new-comer or oldtimer, that he was to work with in this fashion. Patiently, and out of his own enormous vitality and talent, he built up a stable of the best s.f. writers the world had, till then, ever seen.

It was not merely that Campbell might groom and tutor and nudge a writer like Asimov until he was capable of producing the kind of work that Campbell was seeking. When Campbell suggested to Asimov that as editor he wrote the stories that a hundred writers wrote, he wasn't altogether exaggerating the case. In countless instances, Campbell prompted his writers by providing them with the basic ideas for new stories.

Some measure of the continuing degree of involvement, both direct and indirect, that Campbell might have in a writer's fiction may be seen in his relationship with another early contributor, science fiction fan Lester del Rey.

Ramon Felipe Alvarez-del Rey (onger versions of his name have been offered) was a short, slight young man born in 1915, the largely self-educated son of a Minnesota tenant farmer. At the end of 1937, when he made his first story submission to Campbell, he was living in Washington, D. C., and falling in and out of different lines of work.

At first appearance, del Rey might not seem a prime candidate to write for Campbell. He was a feisty, opinionated little cuss, completely bent on living life according to his own lights. Far more important to him than the jobs he might hold was his pursuit of an ever-changing set of hobbies and interests, of which science fiction was just one.

But it happened one day, as young Lester was reading the January 1938 issue of *Astounding*—the very issue in which John Campbell first announced his policy of change—he came to find a particular story intolerable rubbish, and he hurled the magazine across the room in a sudden critical fit. His then-girlfriend wouldn't hold still for this. She challenged him to do as well himself.

Del Rey wasn't used to thinking of himself as a writer. But he knew that John Campbell was now editor of *Astounding*, and in the past he had written letters of comment to the SF magazines that had included words of praise for Campbell's stories. He thought there was a good chance that Campbell would remember his name and at least give him some minimal attention. So he asked the girl if she would be willing to settle for a personal note of rejection. And she agreed.

"The Faithful," the story that del Rey wrote in response to this challenge, was a nostalgic tale of loyal intelligent dogs as the heirs to a dying mankind. Del Rey thought of himself as writing a reply to the story he had so disliked—"Pithecanthropus Rejected" by Manly Wade Wellman. But it is also possible that somewhere in the back of his mind were a few lines thrown out in the course of Don A. Stuart's "Twilight":

"Dogs. They must have been remarkable animals. Man was reaching his maturity then, and his animal friend, the friend that had followed him through a thousand millenniums to your day and mine, and another four thousand millenniums to the day of man's early maturity, had grown in intelligence."

But John Campbell didn't reject his story outright, as del Rey had prepared himself to expect. Rather, he bought "The Faithful" and published it immediately in the April 1938 *Astounding*.

Quite naturally, then, del Rey tried dashing off several more SF stories. But these Campbell did reject. And at this point, del Rey was ready to consider his story sale a lucky fluke and conclude that he wasn't really meant to be an SF writer. On to other things.

But Campbell wouldn't let go of him. He needed his new writers, and he wasn't about to let this del Rey slip away. What Campbell did was to write him a note that said: "Your story was darned well received, del Rey, and it's been moving up steadily in the reader's choice. But as I look through my inventory, I don't find anything more by you. I hope you'll remedy this."

It was exactly the right tone to strike with del Rey—respectful of his independence, unpresuming, and thoroughly flattering in its receptivity. It was more than Lester could resist. He set out to study just what it was that Campbell really did want, and see if he could supply it.

He looked in the market report of the latest issue of *Writer's Digest*. There he found Campbell saying: "I want reactions rather than actions. I want human reactions. Even if your hero is a robot, he must have human reactions to make him interesting to the reader."

The message was clear to del Rey—Campbell wanted science fiction humanized. It was this element in Campbell that had responded to del Rey's story about intelligent dogs mourning the passage of man. Taking his clue from Campbell's market report, del Rey sat right down and wrote a story about a man falling in love with a selfless female robot.

Campbell bought del Rey's story, "Helen O'Leary," and published it in the December 1938 *Astounding*. It was one of the most popular stories of the year.

Shortly thereafter, Campbell wrote again to del Rey. But this time he didn't merely urge del Rey to send him another story—he suggested the idea for one. Perhaps Neanderthal Man wasn't actually exterminated by Cro-Magnon, but died instead from the heartbreak and frustration of meeting culturally and technically superior human beings. Del Rey wrote his version of this in less than two hours—without sparing the human sentiment—and Campbell popped "The Day Is Done" right into the May 1939 *Astounding*.



John W. Campbell, Jr.

And so it would go. During the Golden Age, del Rey would write stories for Campbell under his own name and no fewer than four pseudonyms. Some of these stories would be written completely on del Rey's own initiative, but at least as often Campbell would have to seek del Rey out, woo him away from his latest hobby, and stimulate him with story ideas—all without offending del Rey by appearing to over-direct him.

Eventually, Campbell would entrust del Rey with the major idea of disaster in an industrial nuclear plant. And the short novel that del Rey produced, "Nerves" (*Astounding*, Sept. 1942), would become his best-known story.

Del Rey says of John Campbell:

He was, as I came to know, a great and creative editor. Nobody has any idea how many of the stories in his magazine came from ideas he suggested, but a group of us once determined that the figure must be greater than half.... Part of his success probably came from the fact that he gave just enough of an idea to inspire, but not so much as to stifle the writer's own ideas.

The story seeds planted by Campbell might be plots or situations as specific as those in "The Day Is Done" or "Nerves." But just as frequently, Campbell might hand a writer a universal principle that could be given fictional illustration in any number of different ways. Campbell would convey to the writer a sense of the relationship or operation he had in mind, and it was then up to the writer to elaborate his own particular example of the general case.

Fred Pohl can remember Campbell telling him: "When I think of a story idea, I give it to six different writers. It doesn't matter if all six of them write it. They'll all be different stories, anyway, and I'll publish all six of them."

But, as much as Campbell might contribute to the fiction that appeared in his magazines, he asked for an even greater measure of thought and effort in return. Campbell required commitment, insight and imagination from the writers he gave story ideas to. And if a writer should prove to have no grasp of the new vision, if he was not able to perceive that Campbell was handing him a seed and expecting back a universe, if he was unable both to speak to Campbell's central concerns and also to present Campbell with wonders never seen before, then the editor would not bother to expend further energy and attention upon

him.

As Campbell once said to Isaac Asimov: "If I give a story idea to a writer and get it back exactly as I told it to him, I don't waste any more story ideas on him. I want it to grow and develop inside him. I want more back than I give. I'm selfish that way."

But of all Campbell's new writers of 1938, the one he valued the most was a man who already had his own individual sense of the new vision, a self-starter who didn't have to be cajoled, stimulated, prompted or led into writing modern science fiction, but who had a natural affinity for this splendid new game. This was a tall, thin, highly erudite patrician named L. Sprague de Camp. ▶

### **The Toynbee Convector by Ray Bradbury**

Bantam Spectra, 1989, \$3.95 pb, 225 pages

reviewed by Susan Palwick

When I was growing up, one of my favorite Bradbury stories was "All Summer in a Day," about a young girl on a perpetually rainy Venus whose classmates thoughtlessly leave her locked in a closet during the only day of sunlight that will occur in their lifetimes. Like Tom Godwin's "The Cold Equations," Bradbury's tale is science fiction horror; the two narratives achieve the same emotional effect, at least for me, even though Godwin's plot relies on precise scientific accuracy and Bradbury's is set on a Venus we now recognize as no more realistic than Narnia or Lilliput. Bradbury's story still seems to me to be true, if, however, because it uses a (pseudo)scientific premise to illuminate human behavior.

The childish cruelty described in the story is often dismissed by grown-ups, here on Earth, because it isn't about anything that really matters: marbles or ice-skating or games of tag, things that aren't important and will fade into insignificance in adulthood. By transporting the same kind of behavior into an alien environment, Bradbury shows that the dynamics of such cruelty would be no different if something important were at stake.

The story stayed with me because it so perfectly captured the heartlessness of children (and came at a time when I was frequently subjected to that heartlessness myself), just as "The Cold Equations" stays with the reader because it brings home so implicitly the indifference of nature. My childhood reading of "All Summer in a Day," and many other Bradbury stories, left me with the serene belief that Bradbury was not only a master stylist but a master of the nuances of human emotion. Lots of other people agreed with me. Bradbury was one of the few sf writers permitted into the hallowed pages of the short-story anthologies we studied in English class.

*The Toynbee Convector*, Bradbury's much-heralded new collection—"The first new collection in nearly a decade," as the cover of this paperback edition proclaims in bright red letters—shook both of those beliefs. As I read the twenty-three stories, I was persistently distracted by a nagging sense of false cheer, of artificial brightness, even in many of the tales clearly intended to be horrific.

Upon examination, this unease arises from a joint failure of style and characterization. Nearly all of the characters in this volume sound alike, speaking in an accent composed of italics and exclamation marks. In "Trapdoor," a fifty-seven year old spinster says, "It can't be! How could I have been so blind! Good grief, there's an attic in my house!" (p. 12). In another story, the middle-aged protagonist who has summoned his parents' ghosts for an evening's reunion tells them, "I remember... Why I called, why I brought you here!" (p. 81). A jilted mistress, whose lover has vowed to God to forsake her in exchange for his daughter's recovery from a nearly fatal accident, says, "You could have promised something else!" (p. 115). "Bless this sinner, father!" says the mysterious Christmas Eve penitent seeking absolution from an elderly priest (p. 151). And a story about divorce begins with the estranged husband saying, "You've had the lock changed!" (p. 171).

And on and on. Regardless of age, life situation or level of emotional pain, Bradbury's characters too often share a manic, slightly

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strident energy that tends to render them two-dimensional. They reminded me of the fast-talking, relentlessly determined characters in 1930s film comedies; however much you enjoy the movie, you're always aware that you're watching actors, not real people. In the same way, I was constantly aware of Bradbury's manipulation of his characters—who, by the end of the book, began to seem suspiciously like one character donning wigs and changing sets to play different parts.

To some extent, of course, this problem is a function of the single-author collection, a form that frequently highlights writers' obsessions and repetitions to unflattering effect. It's also, I think, a matter of changing styles; just as sixties haircuts seemed perfectly natural then and look outlandish now, so Bradbury's dialog seems glaringly dated compared to the more laconic speech patterns favored by Gibson, Murphy, and many other, newer writers. I have the same kind of style-allergy to Spinnard, whose characters seem to me never to have left the Summer of Love, so perhaps this is merely a personal reaction. In any event, it seems churlish to accuse Bradbury of being uncool simply because his characters possess boundless enthusiasm and often inhabit an idyllic physical landscape reminiscent of Norman Rockwell.

Sturgeon, whom I now consider the master psychologist and stylist I believed Bradbury to be when I was twelve, once observed that stories are narratives about people in pain. Many of the stories in this collection—and all the most successful ones—feature characters who are haunted by fear, remorse, or loneliness. Their pain frequently stems from something in their childhood. If Bradbury's adult characters often sound like unconvincing actors when confronting death, divorce and abandonment, they become completely believable when reliving early hurts and terrors.


And Bradbury is as eloquent as ever on the need to preserve our memories of things that will change and decay, the places and people we love, everything we will inevitably lose. His nostalgia never becomes sentimental, because at its heart lies the uncompromising certainty that the equations of time are as cold as those of gravity.

My favorite story in the book, "Colonel Stonesteel's Truly Egyptian Mummy," is about an old man who constructs a mummy from bits and pieces of things in his attic to avert the boundless Labor-Day boredom of a small boy. The two sneak the fake mummy into a field, it is duly discovered, and unleashes a frenzy of excitement in the town. When museum experts are called in, the pair steal the mummy from its display so it won't be discovered as a forgery. But as Colonel Stonesteel explains to the child, the mummy's true origins are far from fraudulent:

His body? . . . Mmm . . . made of . . . all the crushed flowers from brand new weddings, dreadful old funerals, ticket-tapes unravelled from gone-off-forever parades to Fair Rockaway, punched tickets for sleepless Egyptian Pharaoh midnight trains. Written promises, worthless stocks, crumpled deeds . . . all things that were once need, hope, first nickel in the pocket, framed dollar on the cafe wall (p. 223).

This description also distills all that is finest in the body of Bradbury's writing, an emphasis not on what is as much as on what could be or might have been, not on what things *are* as much as on the possibilities they represent, all set forth in beautifully cadenced prose. If Bradbury's work falls short by certain standards of contemporary realism, perhaps it is because his characters, rather than living fully in the present, spend much of their time looking forward to the future or

journeying backwards to the past.

The *Toyenbee Connector* is not the volume I would give first to someone new to Bradbury, and I doubt that it will be considered one of his major collections fifty years down the road. But whatever its faults, the book also contains its share of the magic that has made Bradbury one of the most beloved authors in the field. 

### ***Orbital Decay* by Alan Steele**

New York: Ace, November 1989; \$3.95 pb; 324 pp.

reviewed by Greg Cox

At one point in this near-future novel, space shuttle pilot Lisa Barnhart despairs of the fact that her childhood dream of becoming an astronaut has been transformed by reality into just another job. "Oh, baby," she laments as she prepares for her weekly blast-off, "what do you do when the thrill is gone?"

It's a question that echoes discouragingly in the real world of today. Twenty years ago this summer, Apollo 11 landed on the moon and a new era in space exploration seemed to begin. As a nine-year-old that summer, I knew I was going to the stars, and I believe most of my friends felt the same way. Since then, however, the moon's been abandoned, Skylab fell, *Challenger* exploded, and Dan Quayle's been appointed head of the National Space Council.

Still, the oldspacefaring spirit has never really sputtered out in our own little bit of community, even if most of today's sf prefers to skip over the current difficulties in order to get to the good stuff: uplift wars in other solar systems, star treks across the universe, strange encounters with stranger aliens. (Think about it, when was the last time you saw a movie spaceship that didn't have a warpdrive? The last I remember was in 2010—and that was based on a 60s flick.) And, I suspect, a lot of us have been ignoring space altogether in favor of elves, dragons, cyber-woods, and (okay, I admit it) vampires. Indeed, even the grand Twentieth Anniversary of the Moon Landing, although much noted by the media, has inspired only a wave of retrospectives, memoirs, and novels about disillusioned former astronauts. In short, the space program as nostalgia trip, looking backwards instead of ahead.

In this depressed and depressing context, it is perhaps foremost among *Orbital Decay's* many virtues that it confronts this malaise and eventually brings the thrill back to realistic space exploration—by demystifying it with bracing doses of grit, humor, and iconoclasm.

Set about thirty years in the future, *Orbital Decay* is about the men and women stuck for years in the spartan, and utterly boring, environment of our orbital space station (nicknamed "Skycan") while they're employed in the construction of a giant solar power satellite. These "beamsjacks" are nobody's space cadets; according to Steele (in a recent semi-sequel in *Asimov's*), they're the latest generation of high-risk blue-collar all-American hardhats. Generally, they're in it for the money, or on the run from old hassles and failed lives on Earth. The Right Stuff they're not; most of the plot, in fact, stems from the ongoing conflict between the independent, anarchic, disreputable, fun-loving beamsjacks and the clean-cut, pious NASA old guard, with the cards clearly stacked against the latter.

Although Steele is arguably more politically liberal than most of the people who are writing hard sf these days, what's at stake in these battles seems less an ideology than an attitude.

This was what he had imagined the inside of a space station to be like.

And, realizing that, he almost instantly took a dislike to it. A place of computers and men welded together in a fusion that took away humanity. Here there were no pegged-up notices for used cars on sale in Des Moines, no shelves of dogeared paperback books. This was a place of cool efficiency, of fingers urgently tap-tapping on keyboards, eyes straining to read quickly moving figures on glowing blue screens, everyone doing their best to make all the little systems go so that the big systems could go. Some people thrived in it, and some, like Hamilton . . . hated it.

Hamilton's solution to this sterility, by the way, is to introduce marijuana to the hydroponics lab, one of several small, unauthorized attempts by the beamsjacks to humanize Skycan.

At Boskone several months back, I told Steele that his book, with its scruffy rebels waving a covert (and often ingeniously underhanded) war against a humorless, quasi-military establishment struck me as "M\*A\*S\*H in Orbit." He protested, amiably enough, that his model was more *Catch-22*. Well, okay, I never read *Catch-22* (must have been checking out that sci-fi stuff instead) so I can't tell how close he came to his goal, but, for myself, I found his anti-social, trouble-making beamsjacks to be convincing, refreshing, and very entertaining. With its seeming plausibility, and with an additional emphasis on character, *Orbital Decay* approaches another occasional paradigm: it reads like a mainstream novel written in 2016 A.D.

Ace is promoting this first novel, by a largely unknown author, with an unusual amount of effort and enthusiasm: four-color flyers, special reading editions, a personal testimonial from editors Ginger Buchanan and Susan Allison. Too often these days such treatment is lavished on the worthy and unworthy alike, but in this case the hype is both appropriate and justified.

My own favorite scene? Maybe when ex-biker Virgin Bruce finally goes on the warpath against the ever-present, easy-listening, "good-morale" Muzak piped throughout Skycan. Being trapped in space, twenty-four hours a day, with "Born Free" and the Carpenters would probably drive me crazy too.


It's not all fun and games, though. The high-spirited experts are set against a background of genuine heartache, danger, loneliness, boredom, homesickness, and painful memories, all of which serve as reminders that the best way for a would-be astronaut (or space program) to avoid disillusionment is to know what hardships to expect—and, perhaps more crucially, to know what not to expect. No alien princesses, no space opera heroics, and no escape from the mundane and fundamental problems of being human.

Case in point: "Popeye" Hooker. Despite a large and engaging cast, the heart of the book seems to be Popeye, a former fisherman, with a shadowy past, who originally sees space as the ultimate solution to his earthly troubles.

If only we could forget about the high cost of living, advertisers trying to sell us stuff we don't need, and ex-wives who pull disappearing acts. If only we could jump on a space shuttle for a trip away from Earth.

Alas, like Lisa Barnhart, Popeye finds that the final frontier is not the escapist paradise we all too often think of it as. Lisa worries about her kids and her marriage even as she prepares for lift-off, while Popeye's torturing memories follow him to Skycan. And yet, having acknowledged the limitations of our romance with space, as *Orbital Decay* concedes the banal likelihood of Muzak and red tape and long working hours beyond Earth's boundaries, we are now able to appreciate space exploration on new terms—a little more realistically, a little less widely-eyed—and again be stirred by the very real challenges and possibilities Up There.

As Lisa realizes as her shuttle finally blasts off, despite her marital woes and midlife crises, despite the fading of myths and false expectations, "Oh, dear God, this is great . . ."

So, in many ways, is *Orbital Decay*. 

## Striking a Balance

Continued from page 1

But he has built his story around the outline in the historical record, "making only minor changes in the order of events for the sake of dramatic force," and fleshing out the material "with a world of imagined detail" (p. 559). These details never come across to the reader as gratuitous or flat; Silverberg offers enough information to enlighten, fanning interest and providing color and texture to his vision of Africa, but never digresses so far that the details seem forced into the text.

One of the most common problems, even in otherwise wholly successful historical novels, is the difficulty authors have in allowing their characters (especially the central ones) to behave, think, react and live closely to the way people of the time they inhabit would probably have done. For instance, Mary Stewart's Merlin books, despite the Arthurian storyline and fantastic elements, are at their core historical novels. Her Merlin, telling the story in the first person, seems entirely modern. He remains always outside of his society, looking in and describing things from that perspective. Obviously, some concessions must be made, for a protagonist whose character is so alien to ours will almost certainly fail to capture our interest. But Silverberg allows his central character Battell, as well as the others, a good portion of authentic belief, attitude and world-view. Battell holds strong and biased opinions on the Protestant-Catholic conflict, and he shows rational skepticism toward some strange phenomena, but at other times he is as credulous as the rest: "... no man can wholly ignore the power of the unseen world, save at his deadly peril," he says (p. 136); and later, "... I think it was the curse on the grave-robbet that brought the storm onto us, and caused the loss of our ship and all its treasure, and took the lives of some innocent men" (p. 145). Silverberg strikes a very difficult balance between modernization of his characters and historical authenticity, and it is very effective.

Silverberg's mastery of these technical elements of the historical novel is due to his carefully-honed skills at writing science fiction. For science fiction is based on the process of imagining a different world, as full and rich and varied as our own, and making it seem real and present to the reader. The precise use of language to enhance the atmosphere of alienness, the casual incorporation of details that suggest a larger picture in the background, and the weaving of characters that are familiar enough to make the reader care while remaining foreign enough to be plausible representatives of another time and another world, these are all the stock-in-trade of the SF writer, and they are the same tools needed to write a good historical novel.

But the novel's greatness does not lie in its technical skill alone. Silverberg's expert handling of these matters lays the foundations, but it is the thematic content of the book that sets it apart from the average, and which affords comparison with Silverberg's best work, especially *Dying Inside*.

### II. The Hunger for Desert Places

*Lord of Darkness* is far more than a simple novel of an Englishman's African adventures. It is the story of a man's life, of his growth and maturation, of the evolution of wisdom and a philosophy of life. It is the tale of a man's journey deep into an alien world, his attempt to lose himself there, and in the process, learning about himself, and becoming more than he ever could have otherwise.

Andrew Battell leaves England in 1589, bound for Brazil to pillage the Portuguese treasure ships and win some gold with which to marry his beloved. The venture goes awry and leaves him stranded and a prisoner of the Portuguese, who ship him to their African colony of Angola, where he will spend twenty years before returning at last to Essex. His adventures there are a gradual and inexorable immersion in the cultures and societies of sixteenth-century Africa, from the colonial town of São Paulo de Loanda, to the African country of Loango, and finally to the diabolic feasts and whirlwind chaos of the cannibal tribe of Jaggas. Battell at first resists, thinking of England and his betrothed, but he soon realizes that life in Africa requires that he bend with the wind or break. He agrees to pilot Portuguese ships, reversing his initial refusal to serve his country's and his own enemies.

His odyssey proceeds by stages, and it is mirrored in his relationships with women. The first, Dona Teresa da Costa, a beautiful

and ambitious woman of the colony, lures Battell deeper into Africa. She appears purely European, but her grandmother was African, and Battell is at first frightened of her. "Dona Teresa was a creature beyond my knowledge of women. I felt ensnared by the Devil, a slave to dark forces" (p. 79). Yet Battell is fascinated by her foreignness, and their affair burns hot. When she takes the opportunity to travel to Europe with another man, Battell acquires a female slave who becomes his lover. Matamba (as he calls her) is pure African, but she has been Christianized and speaks Portuguese—she is a mixture, more African than Teresa, but not completely alien to Battell. Later still he takes wives and lovers of pure African blood and without a shred of European culture.

A similar pattern appears as Battell sinks gradually into the world of Africa. Piloting a ship to trade at the city of Loango, he is exposed for the first time to a native African culture. The Loangans have been trading with the Portuguese for some time, and they have a town-based society, so that for all their different customs they are not entirely foreign to Europeans. As he confronts the contrasts between the cultures, here and later, he becomes increasingly convinced of the truth of cultural relativity. Custom in Loango forbids anyone witnessing the king eating or drinking, and Battell finds this silly at first, and then horrifying, when he hears that the king even had his own son killed for this error—the belief being that if he does not kill the offender, the king himself would die. Battell is at first critical, but quickly changes his mind: "Indeed it did make a sort of sense, that if one believes a certain thing, then it follows naturally that one must take proper action to ward off its evil" (p. 115).

Battell spends time in the Portuguese army, as ship's pilot and prisoner by turns, and as the years pass England becomes less and less real, and he more and more a part of Africa. Again, his feelings toward women parallel this process: his English betrothed, Anne Katherine, is only a face and a name, and sometimes not even that. The African women—Matamba, Teresa, and unnamed prostitutes at the Portuguese outpost of Masangamu—are who are real to him now. But his immersion is deepest when, betrayed by his Portuguese companions, and with nowhere else to turn, he goes to the cannibal Jaggas for sanctuary. Throughout the book the Jaggas have roamed on the borderlands, appearing occasionally as figures of terror and evil to the Europeans and the settled African peoples. Battell too is horrified by them, but he feels, even early on, a fascination with them. They represent the deep alienness of Africa, they are unpredictable, unsettled, violent and, worst of all, eat human flesh.

In Battell's odyssey this is the underworld. Gandolafa, Imbe-Jagga, king of the cannibals, is the Lord of Darkness of the title. His destructive dream is to cleanse the world of the evils of civilization, to clear the slate for a return to paradise. Battell, though often rebelling internally, feels the terrible pull of this vision, and he becomes a Jaggas, revered for the power of his musket and his golden hair. He wears their clothing, fights their battles, marries one of their women, changes his name to reflect their pronunciation ("Andubait"), and, to his own distress, eats human flesh with them.

As in other literary underworld journeys, Battell has gone to learn something about himself. Upon his arrival at the Jaggas camp, and throughout his time with them, he discourses philosophically with the Jaggas princes. They discuss religion, English and African customs and societies, law and government, etc. Continuing the process begun with his stay in Loango, Battell must consider his own assumptions and presuppositions critically, to see his own beliefs as no more or less true than those of the Portuguese, the Loangans, or the Jaggas: "all faiths are true faiths" (p. 522). He has gained this objective perspective through his immersion in the African world, and it has brought him wisdom and refined his philosophy.

The cannibalism of the Jaggas is a metaphor for this process. Just as the admission of other ways of thought, other customs and beliefs, into the mind has served to improve Battell's character, the Jaggas, in physically consuming others, seek to gain from their virtues. Battell objects, noting that the victims must also have flaws that would be absorbed, and is told that "The cowardice of them is boiled away in the pot, and what remains is their inborn vigor, which we consume" (p. 397). Likewise the introduction of foreign ideas need not contaminate the thinker. In the stewpot of the mind it is possible to select the best of both cultures—the "inborn vigor"—and boil away the vices.

There are limits, however, to the power of this objective perspective. Though Battell has traveled so far and immersed himself so deeply in the African world, he—no more than Odysseus, Aeneas, or Dante—cannot remain in the underworld. He cannot completely lose himself among the Jakqs. His differences are too apparent: "His skin is white! His hair is gold! He is Christian! . . . He is no Jakq!" (p. 411). When the Jakqs plan to attack São Paulo de Loanda, and drive the Portuguese from Africa, Battell is hesitant but willing. Yet when Dona Teresa (returned from Europe) is captured along with a scouting party of Portuguese, he has more serious doubts. At risk of displeasing Calandula, he begs and is granted her release into his custody. Still he intends to take part in the raid on the city, but he has begun his return voyage. When Teresa tries to send a warning message to the unsuspecting city, and she is caught and sentenced to die, Battell makes his choice—he sends his own message, and prays that the Portuguese will come in time to save her. They are too late. They save Battell, though, and it seems he will at last be able to return to England.

Silverberg has invited criticism at times for his underdeveloped female characters. In this book, while it is still narrated by and focuses on a male, he has created a very interesting character in Dona Teresa. She is equally complex as Battell, and acts as a counterpoint and complement to his character. As Battell feels drawn ever deeper into Africa, Teresa yearns for Europe, and this desire drives her as Battell's does him. Yet neither Battell nor Teresa can succeed fully in becoming something other than what they are. Teresa is eaten by the Jakqs—representatives of the deep dark Africa she has tried so desperately to deny—as her mother was when Teresa was very young. Battell, offered the choice of two worlds, knows that he is after all not Andubait Jakq, but Andrew Battell of Essex, for all his ceremonial scars and all the sights his eyes have seen. At the last, the objective perspective gained by this immersion in foreignness gives way to the core of subjectivity and individuality that no one can ever deny.

It would be easy and maybe elegant to parallel Battell's physical exploration of Africa to an internal exploration of himself. But this is faulty. Battell is discovering a self that was always there—certainly a fascination for the alien, and a basic tolerance for different opinions and points of view, were always present in him, and his adventure allows him to explore these aspects of his character. Yet, had he never left England's shore, he would still have been Andrew Battell, and the self he finds in his African journeying is not the self he would otherwise have been. The act of self-discovery becomes the act of self-creation.

### III. The Individual and the Universe

*Dying Inside* has a very similar central thematic content. It gives us David Selig, who, like Battell, is a stranger trapped in an alien world. Born with the power to read minds, Selig (German/Yiddish "alone") has never been able to fit himself into the society of ordinary human beings. He has driven away his family, his friends, and his lovers; and now, at the age of 41, he notices that his power is dwindling, and he believes that it will sometime soon vanish completely.

Selig's encounter with alienness occurs on two levels in the book. First, there is his lifelong isolation as a mind reader (there are others, and he does meet one, but his own emotional problems with his power make him incompatible with this man as well). Like Andrew Battell, he is surrounded by people who, inside, are very different from him, and he must find a way to live with this.

Secondly, there is the gradual decline of Selig's power. This is the closer parallel to Battell's African journey: slowly, by stages, Selig is removed from the "world" of his basic assumptions and preconceptions. Hitherto, his power has "defined and shaped [his] relationship to everybody else in the world" (p. 124). Now, he says, "I'm floundering, looking for definitions of myself, looking for structures" (p. 125).

There are notable differences, however, in the treatment of this theme in *Dying Inside* and *Lord of Darkness*. Battell, as he travels, quickly abandons his urge to cling to his preconceptions, to retain his old definitions of himself, and manages instead to adapt and change in the interests of survival. Selig stubbornly refuses to accept his fate as he senses the decline of his powers, and he rails against it, reaffirming his old self-definitions: "Who will I be, when I have ceased to be myself?" he asks in despair (p. 205). While Battell, throughout his

odyssey, retains the essential core of himself, preserving his individuality even as he absorbs the beliefs and cultures of the people he encounters, Selig fails to do this. He cannot strike a balance between himself and the rest of the world. His power surges in its death throes, and Selig experiences a brief euphoric return to his former strength: "Oh, the joining, the touching, the union, the oneness! No longer is he David Selig. He is part of them, and they are a part of him, and in that joyous blending, he experiences a loss of self. . . ." (p. 230). When at last his power dies, and he has completely entered the alien world of normality, he is, for all intents, dead: "Everything dead, in fact," he says, "All passion spent" (p. 236). The closing of *Dying Inside* is colored by images of cold and numbness. Selig's journey does not include a return to England. He is utterly absorbed into ordinariness, utterly losing the essential difference he had before, losing his individuality.

For Selig, the encounter between the universe and the individual is an either/or situation. There is no possibility of a synthesis or combination, as there is in *Lord of Darkness*. Selig's solution is a negation of the old to make way for the new.

Silverberg's more recent novel *Tom O'Bedlam* shows us another version of this theme. Tom, like Selig, is born with a gift: he experiences visions of distant worlds and vast alien civilizations, and he senses that eventually humanity will be saved from its blighted planet and taken to those alien worlds. In this case, however, Tom's power is not vanishing; in fact, it has been growing stronger, and now other people are starting to see the visions too.

The "encounter with alienness" theme functions on two levels here as well. First, Tom faces problems similar to Selig's. He has lived his life alone and isolated from the rest of the world, and now the thing that has made him different is becoming commonplace. While Selig fights this, growing ever more bitter and more determined to keep the power, Tom is eager for the rest of the world to experience his visions. He yearns to help the world toward its absorption into the alien cultures.

Second, the other characters in the novel are forced to confront in these visions a universe that defies their preconceptions. As the visions intensify in detail and frequency, they journey deeper and deeper into this other world, and finally, they are taken off to the alien

### Read This Recently Read and Recommended by David Britz

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Sometimes amusing, sometimes chilling, Sacks's anecdotes show what a miracle of synergy a healthy nervous system can be, by showing what happens when various bits fail.

Jack Cohen, *The Privileged Ape: Cultural Capital in the Making of Man*

We have achieved everything our neolithic ancestors might have dreamt for their descendants. We're privileged. We got what we wanted. Now what?

words.

*Tom O'Bedlam* resolves the conflict between the universe and the individual in a manner like and yet opposite to *Dying Inside*. Tom and the other characters lose their old identities just as Selig does, but not by becoming more ordinary. Instead, the outside world comes to conform to their inner realities. While Selig is bitter and resistant, the characters in *Tom O'Bedlam* embrace this loss of self, rush toward it, and the conclusion is a Utopian vision of extraterrestrial paradise, rather than a descent from godhood to mortality.

#### IV. Robert Silverberg and the Universe

In his brief autobiographical Introduction to *Worlds of Wonder*, Silverberg says of science fiction writers "We are not, by and large, a clan who found it easy to get along with other people when we were young" (p. 1). This difficulty, he claims, is "why we became dreamers in the first place," why they became science fiction readers and ultimately science fiction writers. In this sense, the social problems of his early years have had the greatest possible impact, shaping his whole life. It is not altogether surprising, then, that the fundamental problem of the relationship of the individual to the world at large is such a dominant theme in his books, and one that lends to his writing a special force and power.

*Dying Inside* is not autobiography, but there are enough parallels to Silverberg's own life in Selig's that some identification is inevitable. Selig is a Brooklyn-born misfit, attends Columbia in 1952, and is possessed of a talent that makes it difficult to relate to the rest of the world. There are less direct but more suggestive congruencies as well: Selig has done very little with his gift, using it for vicarious pleasure and no more, and, at the time of the novel, earns his living ghosting term papers for Columbia students. This is strikingly suggestive of Silverberg's own life story, as he tells it in *Worlds of Wonder*.

... in the course of turning myself from a trembling beginner into a smartass pro I had overlooked the biggest lesson, which is that selling everything you write doesn't mean that you know it all, or even that you know very much. The stuff I was writing, with a few honorable exceptions, was generic boilerplate material designed to help harried editors fill their back pages, not anything likely to live down the ages. ... I chose to settle merely for learning how to write things that someone, anyone, would publish (pp. 30-31).

It was some time before he took the comments of some editors and friends and strove to do better than simply writing to sell. Clearly, *Dying Inside* is concerned, at least in part, with issues significant in Silverberg's own life.

Moreover, the problem of the relationship of the individual to the universe is one that must plague every writer who thinks hard about his craft. For, as Silverberg shows in *Worlds of Wonder*, the only way to learn is to read other people's writing, and study it. To be successful, the writer must be able to learn from and use the experiences, styles, thoughts and ideas of others, while retaining his/her own individuality. The writer cannot simply imitate other writers, but must be able to

combine his/her own knowledge with what he/she reads.

For all these reasons, it seems clear that the theme that drives *Dying Inside*, *Tom O'Bedlam* and *Lord of Darkness* is very important to Silverberg personally. Consciously or not, he must feel it deeply, and this lends to these books a greater power than they would otherwise have.

#### V. To Overcome Despair

*Dying Inside* resolves the problem by reducing Selig to the level of ordinariness; *Tom O'Bedlam* resolves it in the opposite fashion, raising the rest of the world to the visionary level of Tom, and whisking humanity off of Earth into Utopian alien cultures; but both conclude with the loss of individuality in the face of an alien universe. *Lord of Darkness*, in this sense especially, is a more accomplished, wiser and more effective book, for its conclusion takes Battell to neither extreme, but allows for the possibility (and, indeed, the necessity) of striking a balance between the two, individual and universe.

Selig, throughout most of *Dying Inside*, is bitter and despairing. It is difficult to say how long he has been this way—his recollections of the past and the height of his powers seem sometimes nostalgic—but he has wholly given himself over to despair by the time the narrative begins. This contrasts sharply with *Lord of Darkness*. In the face of some of the gravest possible events, threats of death, torture, starvation, betrayal, shipwreck, etc., Battell never gives in to despair, but always finds in himself the will and power to struggle, survive, and most of all, adapt to his situation as far as possible. Battell makes a life for himself in Portuguese Africa: he lives, he learns, he loves, he rises and falls, and when he returns at last to England he is thankful for all the experience, happy to have lived it, even though it was not what he had envisioned for himself early on. *Tom O'Bedlam*, with its Utopian flavor, lacks the impact of either *Dying Inside* or *Lord of Darkness*; the simplicity and ease with which the visions make even the least lovable of the characters into smiling, happy, well-adjusted people blunts the force of the book. Not only is Battell's story ultimately more satisfying to the reader, I suspect it must be also to Silverberg.

In *Lord of Darkness*, Silverberg has succeeded on many fronts. He has given his readers a stirring adventure, and a sharp, historically accurate portrait of sixteenth-century Angola. "My purpose was to show what it might have been like for an English seaman to have spent twenty years in the jungles of West Africa in the late sixteenth century," he says in his Afterword (p. 559), and he certainly has done that. But there's much more going on here. He has written a great novel, exploring the process of self-exploration, and created a character in Andrew Battell who will linger in the mind of the reader long after the cover is closed. *Lord of Darkness* is one of the few books to which I have returned again and again, and gained more from with each reading. In it Silverberg has returned to a theme that he has examined in other works, and which has significance for him personally and professionally. In the story of Andrew Battell, he offers a wiser, more mature resolution than in either *Dying Inside* or *Tom O'Bedlam*. *Lord of Darkness* deserves far more attention than it has received. It is Silverberg's best novel. ▴

### Michael Swanwick The Amateur Demographer Goes to the Bookstore

In the spirit of free inquiry, the Amateur Demographer today pays a visit to Robin's Book Store on Thirteenth Street. There are two Robin's Book Stores in Philadelphia, but the Thirteenth Street store is the merest trifle more pleasant than the shop on Chestnut. Our self-appointed mission is to investigate the widely voiced perception that science fiction is written almost exclusively by men, while fantasy is by and large written by women.

Robin's was chosen for our investigation because it is a general bookstore which displays science fiction and fantasy separately, on identical side-by-side racks. It is also the sort of place where one may linger over the books without causing fear and suspicion.

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Our methodology is simple: Jot down the names of the authors and how many titles each has on the racks, and then crunch a few numbers. Before starting, we resolve to accept the bookstore's finding of whether a book is fantasy or science fiction, and the publishers' attributions of authorship. We do not know what we will find.

The top two rows of each section hold new books, arranged in no particular order, the covers showing. On the shelves below, the books are arranged alphabetically by author, with the spines showing.

We open our notebook.

The first book on the fantasy shelves is Arthur W. Saha's best of the year volume. One for the men. Then a "Dragonlance" book by Paul B.

Thompson and Tonya Carter. One each. Here is Morgan Llwyelyn's *The Isles of the Blest*. Driven by some obscure impulse, we examine the back cover and discover a blurb in miniscule type reading, "I've become a devoted fan!—Ronald Reagan." We blink. What on earth are we to make of this? It is all too deep for us, and hurriedly we return to our task.

A few books on is Volume 3 of Philip José Farmer's "Dungeon" series. Farmer's name appears on the spine, but an examination of the back copy reveals that while Farmer created the background world for the series the volume was actually written by Charles de Lin. Here is the first test of our ground rules and, reluctantly, we give the credit to Farmer. Down we go, past Janny Wurts, Esther Friesner and Louise Cooper. The women are, as expected, in the lead. Then, at the end of second row a clutch of Conan books, written by the likes of Robert Jordan, John Maddox Roberts and Andrew Olfitt, brings the men up from behind. The score, twelve all.

Into the alphabet! Lynn Abbey brings the women ahead again. Robert Adams, with three titles, events things up. Poul and Karen Anderson have a collaborative novel. We are still even. Now Piers Anthony steps into the fray, with fourteen different titles. Robert Lynn Asprin and Lynn Abbey working collaboratively contribute eight "Thieves World" anthologies. We do not attempt to break down the books by sex of contributors—that way lies madness. Asprin also has seven books of his own available, all in the "Myth Adventures" series.

Down a little further, Marion Zimmer Bradley has twelve separate titles. Two of these are "Sword and Sorceress" volumes she has edited, four more are credited as being by Bradley "with the friends of Darkover," which we believe means that both she and other people contributed fiction, and one has a "Special Appearance by Vonda N. McIntyre." We decide not to count McIntyre, though it's a close call.

Quickly now, past Terry Brooks (three titles), Jack Chalker (three), to C. J. Cherryh who has one, a "Merovingen Nights" shared world anthology. At *Sorcerers*, a reprint anthology in the / series edited by Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois, we stop to catch our breaths and contemplate the fact that we have run past 31 male names and 19 female. On we go! Past old friends L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt, past Delany and Dickson and Stephen R. Donaldson (six titles), past Dave Duncan (three) and David Eddings (six), pausing at yet another "Dungeon" book, this one written by Bruce Coville, though by our methodology he is not counted. We come to *Guardians of the Three Volumes I: Lord of Grayscale*, the spine of which boldly proclaims it is "Created by Bill Fawcett." Examination of the cover and title page reveals that it was co-written with Neil Randall, and apparently it's a true collaboration (based on the one writer's ideas) rather than an expansion of the franchise concept.

Not long after, we come to *Lords of Destruction* by Frank Prazetta and James Silk. Again, the ground rules are put to the test, for it turns out that this is Book Two of the "Death Dealer" series, and that Prazetta's contribution was permission to base a series on his painting of the same name. However, integrity is all. The publisher put his name on the cover, and that is that.

On we go, past Barbara Hambly and Simon Hawke, past Tanith Lee (three titles) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea Trilogy*. We pause briefly at *The Mimes of Moria*, which is a gamebook for role-players in the "Middle Earth Quest" series by Susan Mathews and J. D. Rummel, but the ground rules are clear—it's cracked; it's fantasy. Since there is no clue as to J. D.'s gender, it counts as one for the women. A. A. Milne's *Once Upon a Time* has been reissued, we see. Michael Moorcock has eight titles. Larry Niven has edited a shared world (possibly invitational) anthology based on one of his fantasy stories. Will Shetterly and Emma Bull have a "Livest" anthology, the second we've encountered so far. Mark Smith and Jamie Thomson have a role-playing book, *The Way of the Tiger & Overlord*. We're making real progress now. Past S. P. Somtow and Nancy Springer, past J. R. R. Tolkien (three volumes), Karl Edward Wagner, another "Dragonlance" book (which upon examination turns out to be yet another sharecropper series), Gene Wolfe (three quarters of *The Book of the New Sun* tetralogy), Jonathan Wyllie and a final collaborative work by Paul Edwin Zimmer and Jon DeClas.

When! We've made our way through the fantasy. The final score is 80 male names, of which five are editors or author-editors, and 46 female names, of which four are editors or author-editors. Counting mixed-gender collaborations as one full title (which is silly, but less so

than assigning half-titles and pretending to exactitude), we come up with 152 titles for the male writers, 89 for the female.

Four names were discarded as gender-indeterminate, so there's a margin of error here of some untidy-ump percent.

On to science fiction.

The very first book on the sf racks is Terry's *Universe*, edited by Beth Meacham. One for the women, though it was done in honor of the late (and sadly missed) Terry Carr. On past Silverberg and Robert Reed and L. Ron Hubbard. We pause for a second at *The Future at War III: Orion's Sword*, edited by Reginald Bretnor. This is an anthology of what we shall call to guard against accidentally sticking them with a colorful nickname—future war stories. We shall see more of them anon. Past Ian McDonald and Parke Godwin and Kathy Tyers—another female name at last! It's beginning to look like the science fiction half of the equation is holding up. We pause at *There Will Be War: Armageddon*, a future war anthology "Created by J. E. Pournelle." The title page seems to indicate that the actual editing was done by John P. Carr, but again reluctantly we must accept publishers' decision. A little further on is yet another future war book, this one also a shared-world anthology, *The Fleet-Breaker*, edited by David Drake and Bill Fawcett.

We're still in the top racks. On we go, past Jack Vance and Roger Zelazny (*Jack of Shadow* which is one of those almost-certainly sf books that yet taste a lot like fantasy). Past Dan Simmons, Alan Dean Foster (two volumes among the new releases to Octavia Butler. My God! Is this possible?) Only three women among the new releases. The situation is worse than we thought.

At this point, the store manager, who has been racking books nearby, asks if we need any help. We explain what we're about, and he looks thoughtful. "I think you'll find," he says, "that not many women write science fiction. There's James Tiptree, of course, and Octavia Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin, but other than those three that's about it."

"You don't stock C. J. Cherryh?" we ask, shocked.

"Oh yes, I forgot about her."

Back to work. We start at the beginning of the alphabet with Douglas Adams (five volumes), and come to Brian Aldiss who has two and a half. The half is for "The Salva Tree," his contribution to a paper-back which also has Robert Silverberg's "Born with the Dead" printed the other way around on the back. This is an endearing format which we all persist in calling the "Ace Double," even though the publisher in this case is Tor. Conservative field, science fiction.

Here's Poul Anderson (four titles) whom we last saw in the fantasy racks. Ditto Piers Anthony (eleven titles) Charles Platt is here for his franchise—perhaps I mean sharecropper; distinctions get sticky around here—novel *Soma*, written in the universe of Piers Anthony's *Chthon*. Followed immediately by Isaac Asimov who has thirteen titles of his own, plus a "Robot City" novel written by Mike McQuay (who gets his name on the cover, and so is counted), plus two anthologies co-edited with Martin Greenberg, plus another five co-edited with Martin H. Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh. That takes us a good deal further down the rack. On past Janet Asimov, Greg Bear (two), and J. G. Ballard, to Marion Zimmer Bradley who has three titles. One is called *Warrior Woman* and the other two are both Darkover books. David Brin has five titles and John Brunner has two and Jack Chalker has twelve. Peter David contributes a "Star Trek: The Next Generation" book, which seems to be malaphephized.

We've reached C. J. Cherryh at last. Four volumes of her own, plus one she edited, a "Merovingen Nights" shared-world anthology. There was a different "Merovingen Nights" anthology among the fantasy, but we agreed to accept the determination of the bookstore. A good thing, too, for taxonomy is a thorny art. Past Arthur C. Clarke (five and a half titles), Jo Clayton (three) and Philip K. Dick (four). *Confessions of a Crap Artist* is technically speaking not sf, but we haven't the time to quibble. David Drake has two titles of his own, one collaboration with Thomas T. Thomas, and a co-editorship with Bill Fawcett of another "Fleet" book. We pause to admire M. J. Engh's *Arsian*. One for the women.

Randall Garrett and Vicki Ann Heydron have two collaborations. To no one's surprise, Robert Heinlein makes a strong presence with ten titles. He is just barely edged out, however, by Frank Herbert, who also has ten titles of his own, plus two collaborations with Bill Ransom. L.



Ron Hubbard has three-tenths of his "dekalogy" down here, and another tenth among the new paperbacks. His name is also blazoned on Volume Five of the "Writers of the Future" anthology, but the actual editing there was done by Algis Budrys, whose name fortunately does appear on the cover. Credit is awarded to Budrys.

We note with pleasure that Gwyneth Jones' *Diotine Endurance* is out in paperback. Oughtn't Joe R. Lansdale's *The Drive-In* be listed as horror? Well, it's welcome here, whatever it is. Stanislaw Lem has three titles. Le Guin has two. George R. R. Martin has one of his own and three "Wild Cards" shared-world anthologies. There's R. A. McAvoy, Ann Maxwell, Julian May (four titles), and Anne McCaffrey (eight) all in a row. Four more for the women. Just past Michael P. Kube-McDowell is Vonda N. McIntyre with two titles.

We linger for a moment over *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller, Jr., and then come to Judith Moffett. The manager goes by again and holding up Moffett's book we explain, "This is by a local writer. It's got spacefaring Quakers. That's why it's called *Pennsylvania*, to evoke William Penn and the settlement of Pennsylvania." He looks impressed, or possibly bemused.

There are seven Larry Niven titles and two of his collaborations with Jerry Pournelle. We pause for a second before the nine—nine!—John Norman "Gor" volumes and wonder, "Is this really fair?" But yes. The books are, we recall, patterned after Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars books. Blame for this one cannot be dumped at fantasy's doorstep.

Here's our old friend, Andre Norton, and just beyond is Frederik Pohl, who has four titles and an omnibus volume of three of his collaborations with Jack Williamson. Jerry Pournelle has one book of his own, and three more "There Will Be War" anthologies. Tim Powers' *On Stranger Tides* is credited to science fiction, though it might as easily be listed as fantasy, or possibly even horror. We pause again at Jennifer Roberson's *Chronicles of Chesham: Book Two of the Song of Homana*. It certainly looks like fantasy, and we wonder might it be mislabeled? But the rules are clear.

Pamela Sargent, Robert Shekley, Charles Sheffield—we think how pleasant this inventory is to make, how many fine evenings we have wasted in the company of good books. Clifford Simak has two titles, as does John Sladek. S. P. Somtow—we encountered him in fantasy too, remember—has four. Only one book by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky, we note sadly. We're getting near the end. Theodore Sturgeon, four titles. Robyn Talbot, Judith Tarr, Sheri S. Tepper. Two titles by James Tiptree, Jr. who was of course a woman writing pseudonymously. Three by Jack Vance, and two by Kate Wilhelm. Two books by Gene Wolfe.

Donald Wollheim's last best of the year volume (it's sad how many of our people have died over the last few years) was at least partially edited by Art Saha, who gets no cover credit. Timothy Zahn has two titles. George Zebrowski contributes three issues of *Synergy* (which save for Meacham's *Terry's Universe* is the only non-theme unshared worlds original anthology on these racks). We finish up with Roger Zelazny who has seven titles out. Five of these are Amber novels, which most people would classify as fantasy, and two we could argue either way.

Now for the tally. There are 134 men credited on this set of racks, and 31 women. Of the nine editors (some also authors) only two were female. The men had 291 titles on the racks, and the women had 54.

Three names were discarded because we couldn't tell what they were, and so there is a statistical variance of, oh let's say about yaysmo much.

What have we learned?

In the fantasy racks, we have been amazed at the proliferation of new forms. In among the old, familiar trilogies and open-ended series novels are a startling number of shared worlds, franchise novels, share-cropper books, "Special" Guest Appearances, and variations thereof. The science fictional response has been, by comparison, relatively staid. (Our impression, though, is that fantasy simply started earlier and that science fiction, with any number of posthumous "sequels" to famous works and novel-length expansions of classic short stories in the works, is rapidly catching up.)

In the science fiction racks, we have discovered that many of our writers, including new and relatively young writers, are writing fantasy as well as science fiction. There are, moreover, a good many science fiction novels that could be marketed on the cousin racks without a word of protest. This is encouraging to those of us who grew up when fantasy and science fiction were one genre and had been rather disheartened to see them splitting apart.

We note with alarm the proliferation of future war volumes among the science fiction, and hope that this is a phenomenon of extended peacetime, and not a collective premonition of impending war.

Finally, we have settled to our own satisfaction the question that first led us here. Yes, there are more women numerically and by percent being published in the fantasy genre than in science fiction. No, women are not predominant in fantasy.

We believe these data are significant and that more could be made of them than we choose to attempt. But our ambitions are modest, our analysis is over, and your applause is gratefully acknowledged. ▶

Michael Swanwick, author of *Vacuum Flowers*, lives in Philadelphia.

## Generational Saga

### Responses to Kathryn Cramer's article "The New Generation Gap"

*This is the first installment of responses and comments occasioned by Kathryn Cramer's statistical study published in the last issue (#11) of The New York Review of Science Fiction. This forum will be continued in the next issue. We particularly encourage writers under thirty to send us their dates of birth and the data concerning their first professional publications.*

My first reaction to "The New Generation Gap" was that Kathryn Cramer's questions were not only fuzzy, but also the wrong ones to ask. She admits that her survey is incomplete and biased, so what can it really show? If beginning writers are, on average, getting older, isn't this just demographics, a reflection of the fact that our country's population as a whole is aging? The article seemed only another intelligent but misguided attempt at trying to form a grand theory to explain what's happening in this field.

Yet the more I thought about it, the more provocative the issues Ms. Cramer raised became. My response may be as fuzzy as her questions, but the questions do deserve more consideration.

Last week, I spent some time with a fourteen-year-old, the child of friends, who had devised an elaborate board game, complete with

long biographies of his characters and his artistic renderings of them. It's my impression that the sorts of kid who might once have tried their hand at writing science fiction are more interested in gaming, comics, computers, and other such things. Even when they read science fiction, as many do, they often don't think of writing it. Why? I suspect partly because gaming, computers, and the rest seem as fresh to them as science fiction once did to earlier generations of teens. Science fiction isn't fresh now; it's part of the landscape. Some writers and editors are trying to keep it fresh through a collective act of amnesia; they dismiss the past and chase after the latest trendy writer or approach. The field is becoming more fragmented; it may soon make no sense to ask where science fiction is going, because there may eventually be no collective entity one can call science fiction, only a lot of writers going off in different directions. This offers more creative freedom, but at the cost of forgetting the lessons earlier writers might have learned when the field was younger.

If anything's giving science fiction cohesiveness at this point, it may be the growth of workshops and other such gatherings. I don't know if this is a good thing. At the conventions I attended recently, several young people asked me if attending a workshop was a requirement for publication. They all seemed mightily relieved when

I admitted that I'd never attended a workshop or creative writing class, and that finishing stories and sending them out was sufficient. Some aspiring writers—maybe most—shouldn't go near a workshop. They'll grow deaf to the sound of their own writing voice before they even have a chance to hear it. Everyone talks about the successes workshops have; few mention the failures, those who gave up in despair. Writing is a solitary activity, not a collective one, and workshops, apart from demoralizing people who may not be ready for them, can lose sight of that.

Yet more aspiring writers feel they have to go to such gatherings; I've even seen a few newer writers list them as credits! This seems to reflect what I'll call, for lack of a better term, the creeping credentialism of the society as a whole. It doesn't matter what you've done or what abilities you can show, just whether or not you have diplomas, certificates of instruction, or other official stamps of approval. Some writers, especially young and overly sensitive ones, can handle the rejections of a distant editor but not extensive (and often destructive) criticism from their peers; believe me, I know, having been one of them myself. I don't think we're doing young writers a favor, or encouraging some of them, by placing such importance on workshops.

Frankly, I wonder how much incentive a young person has to be a writer now. Once, the writer, whether of popular fiction or of serious work, had an important and respected position, even a romantic one. This isn't true any more. Few are told to quit school and strike out on their own, as did John Cheever, even when this might be the best thing for their writing. Few can hope to make a living as writers now, or be respected for it even if they do. Instead, many are advised to study creative writing and get the credentials needed to land a university gig, or to do a nine-to-five and think of writing as a hobby. What self-respecting teenager, full of talent and adolescent fervor, is going to welcome that prospect?

No wonder we have a generation gap. Too many of us are thinking of our careers instead of what we have to say in our work. Too many of us have forgotten what we once loved in science fiction, or what made us want to write in the first place. There are plenty of obstacles in the way of aspiring teenaged writers now, but I doubt they're greater than the ones I faced, and that many past writers have faced (messy family lives, poor educations, distractions, physical violence, drugs, death, and poverty, to name only a few—I had a lifetime of experience before I was twenty). I think we may be raising more obstacles whenever we talk to hopeful young writers about how to plan their careers instead of responding to their enthusiasm and simply saying that they should write, finish what they write, and send it to someone who can buy it.

If science fiction writers as a whole are aging, maybe this won't matter if the readers are as well. (This means, of course, that we have to hope there's no attrition among readers and that more older people who haven't read science fiction will try it.) If the field is becoming more "mature," this doesn't mean we have to lose younger readers; the age of a writer isn't what keeps his or her work from speaking to the young. (I get plenty of letters from kids who've read my young adult novels, but I get just as many from teenagers who have read the books I wrote for adults—and I didn't write the young adult books until I was in my thirties.) But we may have lost something in losing the teenaged writer—the vigor and freshness of youth, an intensity and sensitivity to experience that even the "mature" writer should never lose. If we recaptured that youthfulness in ourselves, maybe more young writers would be drawn to join us.

—Pamela Sargent  
Johnson City, New York

I sold my first story at 18 and by the time I was 30 I had written all the stories that appear in *I, Robot* and *The Foundation Trilogy*. The letters I get from 12 to 15 year olds are as enthusiastic today as they were 35 years ago, whether they talk about *I, Robot* and *The Foundation Trilogy* of the 1940's, or about *Prelude to the Foundation* and other novels I wrote in the 1980's. I have not changed my style, and apparently intelligent teen-agers are still intelligent teen-agers. So there's no need to worry.

—Isaac Asimov  
New York, New York

Kathryn Cramer's statistical investigation is certainly interesting. My eye was first caught by the rise of the 41+ age group in the '56-'65 section, which suggested that at least a good many people who got into science fiction stayed there, then I realized that these were starting ages, so I hadn't been reading carefully enough.

While Greg Benford's point about the decline of the educational system may have some weight, I can't believe it's the whole story. I was a high school teacher for forty years myself, and while my mostly pre-school experience is probably typical I met plenty of highly imaginative and strongly motivated youngsters during that period. A smaller percentage of these may have written and submitted stories, but the total numbers should still have been high.

Naturally, as time went on, the teen-age writer had more and more competition from older and more experienced ones, and this might have raised the percentage of rejection slips before first sale. Even an unchanged percentage of first-rejection discouragement might then contribute to the decrease which bothers Ms. Cramer (and me).

I imagine you already have my statistics, but in response to your request, I was born May 30, 1922, and received my first letter of acceptance (from John Campbell) in October, 1941, when I was nineteen years old and a junior at Harvard. I had published two articles a little earlier, one on Mars in the magazine *Telescope* published at Harvard Observatory, in (I think) the October 1940 issue, and on Uranus and Neptune in the January '41 (again, I think) *Sky & Telescope* (which had recently been born from the merging of *Sky*, published by the Hayden Planetarium in New York, and *Telescope*). They were under my own name, Harry C. Stubbs, and were the reason I chose to use a pen name for my science fiction—I was not sure at first how the Harvard authorities would react to the same name in their slick astronomical publication and a pulp. By the time I found that my faculty advisor, Donald H. Menzel, who had encouraged the articles (he edited the magazines for a while), and the observatory director, Harlow Stapley, both approved of it and wouldn't have minded at all, the "Hal Clement" label had commercial value, so I kept it.

—Harry Stubbs (Hal Clement)  
Milton, Massachusetts

The "aging" of (entry-level) writers strikes me as symptomatic of any field that is essentially moribund or in decline, in which every convention of the form is itself an old hat. The raw, imperfect nature of imaginative "beginners" rubs against the workmanlike, "competent" (a dirty word in my vocabulary), predictable genre fare required in every editorial office in NY.

The rare genius who has been inspired by the fantastic, but is not really imitation genre product, is viewed editorially as not really within the genre at all. Young writers I'm aware of (an example jumps to mind: Chris Custer, San Francisco poet and experimental horror writer known to few outside his neighborhood, who I've been reading since he was 19) are really too good for notice from commercial editors. (I think Chris, because he's headed for a career in academia, will one day be well known in university press circles, say when he's thirty and the genius is burned out of him. I've published him, but I doubt any other editor "in our field" ever will.) Willfulness of imagination and spirited extremes are not welcome guests in the houses of mass-market *tsf*, and that pretty much excludes bright young talents.

On the other hand, I don't believe there's any actual shortage of commercially predictable authors under twenty-five, writing the same kind of banal genre fiction that wins accolades and awards for older beginners. Their problem is that they can't break through the wall of established Competents. A few young writers are published invisibly under names like Robert Vardeman. Many others are "mere girls" writing shifty fantasy novels and therefore excluded from the clishu and so-called "important" circles of 34-year-old men writing sf—hip dudes approaching middle age calling themselves cyberpunks or splatterpunks, borrowing the taste of youth to disguise their balding heads and rounding tummies.

Doubtless the alarming statistics you've given are skewed away from the vast number of young women selling romantic fantasy novels and shared-world short stories and who Susan Allison or Terri Windling have especially liked to publish—writers who are forever unimportant because it isn't sci-fi and they ain't boys (not that they

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deserve to be noticed, but neither do the 34-year-old "youths" who do get lionized.

A field with declining percentages of young voices is obviously in bad shape. An openness to outrageousness, peculiarity, experiment, rawness, artiness and even error is currently lacking. A preference for repetition, reliability, predictability, and a nearly passive malleability on the part of the authors themselves, runs against youth and/or artistry. A third-novel author can continue his career by writing his first three novels a fourth time, and the few youngsters who break through generally fit the same moldy mold by lovingly imitating rather than innovating.

In my own case, some of the best stories I wrote at age 23 were not published until I was 30 and had won an award for editing *Amazons!* These include "Lincoc's Journey" that Terry Carr reprinted in a Year's Best Fantasy, "Honey of the High Place" published by Allen & Unwin, and "A Child of Earth and Hell" published in the *Berkley Showcase*, all included in my recent collection *A Silver Thread of Madness* (which you should have reviewed, meanees). None of these stories required revision from when I wrote them in 1973, but they were rejected for seven or eight years until, for reasons other than quality of the manuscripts themselves, I gained notice. It seems evident to me that **NO EDITOR IN ANY IMPORTANT POSITION IS CAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING NEW AND UNIQUE TALENT.** They can only recognize what they've seen before, what has worked before, preferably from authors who've already done it. Everything else is puzzling or too risky.

Most of the beginners who feel it's "who you know, not what you write" that counts are unfortunately not good enough to be published anyway, but their suspicions are nonetheless correct, and the occasional first-rate young writer has about as much chance of publication as a total no-talent. Only by bashing at the door masochistically for ten years will the establishment take notice of the persistent little devil. And if by then the bright youngster has mellowed into a dimly competent and malleable milquetoast, they may even become grand midlist "hits" for editorial departments looking for product, not literature. So far as I've experienced, even our "best" editors (hi, David) are still vaguely incompetent adjuncts to commerce looking for the kind of malleability and ordinariness not to be found in talented youths or even in those of us who are turning forty without caving in—the relative lack of young writers being only one symptom of the general decline in *ts/tf* and supernatural fiction category publishing.

—Jessica Amanda Salmonson  
Seattle, Washington

(Age of first sale: 18, with an article to *Seventeen Magazine*. First SF sale: 20, with novel to Ace Books.)

Cramer's statistics are both fascinating and scary. But first let's note something they are *not* indicative of. They don't indicate the decline of the general educational system—because the teenage writer is by and large the adolescent who learned to read by age three—or, like me, a dyslexic who learned to read wholly outside the general education system anyway. The teenage writer needs access to a good library (public or college) and some time in which to read. But the general education system is not particularly good at supplying either of these.

What these statistics indicate is that science fiction is no longer producing the sort of work that inspires the teenage writer to immerse him or herself in the field, to submit to the field, to commit her or himself to science fiction. The thoughts of youth are (like the man said, and generally speaking) long, long thoughts. They are not about money, or power, or even phenomenally successful marketing strategies. And while these kids may be grateful simply to be published at all, the young writer's humility is based on the fact that the real goals have to do with art and immortality and the greatness that transcends mere popularity.

Those of us who've been around in the field for a while may need a crick in the order to tell us which are the truly great works in our canon—not so the youngster. When she reads a piece that leaves her ears a-ringing for a week with its resonances and her eyes dazzled for the next six days with its afterimages, when he finds a tale that ties a knot behind both knees whose ache goes up to the belly and homes there for a month—well, no one has to tell these youngsters they've just encountered the

marks of immortal grandeur. And the resultant feeling—"I want to write stories that produce such soul-transforming effects"—is as immediate as the left hand against the right sounding the clasp.

If the younger writers aren't coming in, it's because the older writers are not producing work of the ambition, vision, range, and intensity to make the young feel that here—and here alone—is the only place they could possibly be!

—Samuel R. Delany  
New York, New York

Thanks for letting me see Kathryn's "New Generation Gap." I'm sorry that my comments will be necessarily brief. First, my personal statistics: I was born March 7, 1944, and received word of my first sale (fiction or otherwise) a couple of days before my 24th birthday, in 1968.

Having always been disinclined to attach any great significance to age per se, I find the statistics in the article an interesting set of observations, but reserve judgment on whether they have any profound import. However, one of the questions posed at the end of the article does seem to me strongly important: "Should SF writers be trying to write for 12-year-olds?" A very good children's book editor once remarked to me that people who try to write for children usually fail—the good children's books result from first trying to tell a good story, and then noticing that children would enjoy it. In our field, I think we very much need to be trying to get more 12-year-olds to read SF, not so much by consciously writing down to them, but by finding better ways to get stories they would enjoy into their hands.

—Stanley Schmidt  
New York, New York

Re your recent query per the Cramer piece in NY Review of SF, I was born in 1937 and my first published story for which I received money (\$25) was "Mr. Fuller's Revolt," which appeared in the October, 1954 issue of *Literary Casalcade*, the National Scholastic Society magazine, when I was 17. It was a fantasy.

—Roger Zelazny  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

My birthdate is November 12, 1945. My first sale came in 1969, while I was still 23, I believe. The story itself—"Pitton Fall"—appeared in the Oct.-Nov. *Galaxy*. Actually, I had sold a poem, "An Echo Through the Timepiece," to the *Georgia Review*, while still a student at the University of Georgia; it appeared in the Winter 1968 number of the *Review*. My first novel, *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire*, appeared in February 1975 when I was 29; I had sold several stories by this time, including a trio of Hugo- and Nebula-Award-nominated novellas.

—Michael Bishop  
Pine Mountain, Georgia

I liked Kathryn's article, but don't really know that I have much to add. Other than the observation that it isn't really all that odd that the writers in my "Postmoderns" article should be roughly the same age as myself. Every generation thinks its own problems and preoccupations the most interesting, eh?

—Michael Swanwick  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

I was born in 1954. My first sale was to *Last Dangerous Visions* in 1974.

While there's no doubt that SF is a gerontocracy today, I wonder if this has much to do with the policies of genre writers or publishers. I suspect the major factors are societal and demographic, not subcultural. I'd like to see similar studies from some genetically declining American soft-science—one not supported by the Pentagon, like say Geograpy, or Crustacean Taxonomy. I suspect you'd find a situation much along these lines: a tenured elite of grand old scholars who broke in in

the forties, a crowd of G. I. Bill guys who are doing most of the current publishing, a somewhat smaller crowd of sixties revisionists who hang on to respectability by the skin of their teeth, and finally a thin leavening of seventies types who are either bland careerists or grimly determined fanatics.

As for the eighties kids, birth control got most of them. The rest have better things to do.

—Bruce Sterling  
Austin, Texas

Statistics: born 1929. First professional publication: 1959 poetry, 1961 prose fiction. First paid publication: 1962 s.f./fantasy. (I don't consider payment as constituting professionalism, in poetry or non-science-fiction.)

—Ursula K. Le Guin  
Portland, Oregon

Reuter: I think the phenomenon Cramer is talking about is real enough, and I think Greg Benford has half the reason: i.e., the schools no longer bother teaching youngsters enough basic skills to become writers until the student is out of school and old enough to have recovered from the flaws of the system. But there's another half, I think. Science fiction has shifted emphasis from idea to style. Most of those first stories of the 30s and 40s would be rejected by today's editors because they are so poorly written. Quality of writing was simply a less important criterion than content, as you can see by looking at even such seminal classics as "A Martian Odyssey." Weinbaum had great ideas, but his characters are made of Play-Doh and his prose grates on the ear. I suggest that a bright high-schooler may well be able to think up a good idea, but maybe to write well takes more maturity.

Contrariwise, however, I think most of the break-in stories of today's writers would have been bounced by the editors of the '30s and '40s because they rarely have anything to say that hasn't been said a thousand times before. I don't personally think the change is an improvement. I don't enjoy crude writing, but I don't enjoy boringly derivative stories, either. I know what I really want from science fiction. I want it all.

—Frederik Pohl  
Palatine, Illinois

First I am not convinced that the age of an author when he gets his/her first professional publication is all that significant. In the SF field, most professional authors have been writing for years—for fan magazines, usually—before they are published in a professional magazine or by a book publisher. It would be more interesting, I think, to examine the age at which people begin to read science fiction. That tends to remain fairly constant over the generations, I believe. When we did readership surveys at *Analog*, I remember, new readers seemed to appear at just the necessary pace to replace those who died. It prompted me to theorize about the Spontaneous Creation of Readers.

In general, I think this "aging effect," if it is real, is nothing less than a reflection of the lengthening adolescence so visible in other parts of our society such as pop music. Young people tend to retain adolescent behaviors and attitudes well into their forties. This is possibly a consequence of our lengthening life expectancies and/or the growing complexity of modern civilization. Myself, I think it's a result of the incredible wealth that we all seem to take for granted. A young person can remain a virtual adolescent for decades, without the need to worry about hunger, shelter, or all those swell problems that aged previous generations so quickly.

Actually, it seems to me that despite the increased age of new SF writers, most of the stories in the field are still quite juvenile in outlook. There is precious little SF written for mature minds. This may be a necessary condition of the field, since SF is basically interested in societies rather than in individuals, and is oriented toward outward processes rather than inner struggles.

So—to answer Ms. Cramer's questions:

1. I do not believe that science fiction will become a literature by 35-year-olds for 35-year-olds. New readers enter the field in their teens, as has been the case for several generations.

2. Will the aging of the authors alienate young readers? Apparently not. Look at those who read Gordy Dickson's *Dorsai* books, as an example.

3. Should science fiction writers be trying to write for twelve-year-olds? Most of them do already, whether they realize it or not. Most twelve-year-olds, on the other hand, abhor the thought of "young adult" fiction and try their damndest to get to "the good stuff."

4. Will the current emphasis on writer's workshops and future writers raise the average age of new writers, or will it lower it? Yes, decidedly. One or the other.

5. Is this new generation gap between new readers and new writers a good thing, or a problem to be solved? Since there has been no evidence presented that a generation gap exists (in the sense of a gap in attitudes and affinities) this question actually begs the question.

By all outward signs, science fiction is growing in popularity and critical respect. It is maturing in its outlook, but very slowly. The field is still heavily biased toward juvenile attitudes, and perhaps that's the way it should be.

Personal data: Born 8 November 1932. First publication of fiction was in 1949, to small magazines in the Philadelphia region. First novel published in 1959. First fiction published in a science fiction magazine, 1960.

—Ben Bova  
West Hartford, Connecticut

Birth date: Feb. 1, 1939

First professional sale—poetry 1959

First professional sale of fiction—1962

First professional sale of non fiction—1954

(My son Adam's first professional book sale—not fiction—was at age 15. He's a musician and did the music for *The Lullaby Song* Book while still in high school, finished the music for *The Lullaby Songbook* at age 18, wrote two songs for the third *Lullaby Songbook* at age 17. Does the latter count in your poll? It was in an sf volume professionally published.)

As far as the study goes, I have always blocked graphs. They look like little wavy lines to me. I prefer pie charts. Or the kind that look like the New York City skyline.

But I hope that you factor into your revisions some of the following.

1. In the early 1960s, children's publishers and librarians invented something called YA or Young Adult literature. Today YA books have their own sections in the public libraries, their own journals, their own review media, their own prizes. I think there has been a siphoning-off affect of both readership and writers into this area.

2. What about the incredible rise of tv and movies for adolescent readers. Note how many of the fans at conventions are media fans, and have not read a book unless it is a novelization of a movie or a tv series they adore.

3. Are there factors involved in the careers of women writers, i.e. do they begin later? After families? Or during families? Or feel a push towards one kind of sf literature (fantasy, children's books, short fiction, poetry?) or another?

As you see I don't know the answer to your questions, but you so far haven't answered mine. I applaud this first look at the changing demographics. Now let's look deeper.

—Jane Yolen  
Hatfield, Massachusetts

Greg Benford is certainly right when he lays the blame on "the educational system," though I would rather he had said "the public schools." Their deterioration has not been halted; given more money, they buy more computers and audiovisual aids, when better teachers and better discipline are needed. Private and Catholic schools have maintained something approaching the old standards, but few Catholics and very few rich kids read or write SF.

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I might add that schools often assign SF now. Many kids hate anything they're forced to read.

Michael Swanwick is equally right when he blames the lack of short fiction markets. I could name an intelligent man of 42 who is working on his first SF novel. Though he began it six years ago, it's far from complete. If he had been a short-story reader, he would probably have begun with a short story and been published before forty. (He would have learned to write much faster if he had started by writing short stories, too.)

Furthermore, the U.S. population is aging as a whole. Thus both new writers are growing older as well, it cannot be otherwise.

Lastly, there's the obvious matter of price. In the late forties a cheap lunch costs 75¢, a paperback 25¢. Today a cheap lunch costs around \$2.50 and a paperback about \$3.95. That's pretty serious money for a 12-year-old, who can see a first-run movie here in Barrington for \$2.

I was born on May 7, 1931. I received word of my first sale (a short story) on June 4, 1965.

—Gene Wolfe  
Barrington, Illinois

For the record, I made my first pro sale to *Unearth* magazine in 1975. I would have been 24 or 25 then, when I wrote that story. In that same issue of *Unearth* appeared first-sale stories by William Gibson, Somtow Sucharitkul, and Richard Bowker. I don't know about Bowker, but Somtow and Gibson are roughly my age (Swanwick's typical age—

I was born in 1950) maybe a year or two younger. I throw that in simply because when *Newromancer* appeared, Bill wasn't entirely a new writer any more. I wonder if these days, what with the thousands of books being published in the genre, authentically new writers tend to remain invisible, sometimes for years, especially if for the first years of their careers they only publish the occasional story.

Anyway, when I was writing my first publishable stories, Tim Powers was finishing his first novel for Laser books, he was 23, I think, when he sold the portion and outline to Roger Elwood. K. W. Jeter was contracting for, or finishing, his second novel for Laser, and was working up an outline for his third novel, which would sell to Daw. He would have been 24 or 25 at the time. K. W. and Tim have been selling steadily since; I crept along more slowly, finally selling my first novel to Del Rey in, I think, 1979. It appeared in August of 1982.

—James Blaylock  
Orange, California

Your massive reached me (born 1934, first sale at age 17 concealed for years but alas unearthed by diligent bibliographers) today. I suspect the key to Ms. Cramer's inquiry lies in the changing nature of the market. The precocious kids who sold early to the sf mags have their counterparts in the 18-25-year-olds who design best-selling computer games. Main difference? They make \$umpten million. We're still constantly broke.

—John Brunner  
Somerset, England

**Pennterra by Judith Moffett**

Toronto: Worldwide, October 1988: \$3.95 paperback; 320 pages  
reviewed by L. E. Modesitt, Jr.

How should we deal with an environment increasingly disrupted by pollution, unlimited appetites, and unthinking application of technology? And what form of government is best suited to make those choices?

In *Pennterra*, poet Judith Moffett places a Quaker colony upon Pennterra, another world inhabited by not only the alien Hrossa, but by a revealed and active deity—the unspeaking but effective Yanka Wakan.

The novel's strongest point is its basic understanding of ecology 20 The New York Review of Science Fiction

and environment, that an environment is governed more by its smallest elements than by the top of the ecological totem pole. Other writers, such as Neal Barrett, Jr., in *Through Darkest America*, or Niven, Pournelle, and Barnes in *The Legacy of Honor*, focus on the visible, creating ecologies and/or creatures which are improbable, to be charitable. Unhappily, Moffett then turns around and undermines this ecological understanding with a banal we-them clash between the first Quaker colonists and the later unthinking and polluting non-Quaker colonists and with a series of improbably explained *disaster machines*

incidents, apparently in order to emphasize the power and involvement of the unseen Tanka Wakon.

Another strength of the book is its showing how a cooperative Quaker society could work under such adverse conditions. The personal dynamics are well thought out—except for how such a colony accepted the Hrossa conditions to begin with. The Quakers have spent twenty years crossing space, only to discover they have reached an inhabited system. In a sketchy series of descriptive flashbacks, Moffett reveals that these enterprising souls meekly agreed to a rather stringent set of rules in order to colonize a small isolated portion of Pennterra. There are few arguments, no shows of force, and the Quakers agree.

The highly intelligent aliens, the Hrossa, are physically unable to resist either the Quakers or the later non-Quakers. Luckily, they don't have to provide the resistance. All is taken care of by Tanka Wakon.

While the Hrossa speak for Tanka Wakon, they do not act for their god. They only explain. And Tanka Wakon acts through the smallest elements of the Pennterran ecology. This true-to-the-ecology action creates some rather interesting, and distressing, results for the colonists when the Hrossa prophesy disaster for Danny, the son of the ostensible protagonist—George Quinlan. The Quakers, though non-violent, expect some type of direct physical attack and react accordingly. The attack does occur, but in a way unforeseen by any of the characters, either the Quakers who have comprised the initial colonists or the non-Quakers from the second colony ship.

In introducing the book, Isaac Asimov claims that the novel discusses the conflict between violent and non-violent means of resolving problems. That comparison misses the point. The non-violent

Quakers "win" not through violence, but through the efforts of a subtle and powerful deity.

Another strong point is Moffett's extensive description of the emotional and physical impact of the Hrossa breeding season and its empathetic impact on the Quakers who have been allowed to observe the Hrossa outside the quarantined Quaker valley of Delaware. There is so much sex that it becomes divorced from conventional morality, divorced from conventional societal restrictions and taboos. This illustrates emphatically that routine acceptance of the sexuality of adolescents, as represented by Danny, leads to better adjusted and saner adults—especially when contrasted to the sexual abuse practiced by one of the non-Quaker parents.

Again, after such a powerful impact, later revelations about the relationship between sex and reproduction turn the question once more into a theological puzzle about the role of a deity and whether natural selection is in fact "natural." On Pennterra, it certainly isn't.

In the end, *Pennterra* is a religious morality play—a Quaker version of C.S. Lewis—using science fiction conventions as convenient props. And that's too bad, because the individual elements, including clear language, real people, and an understanding of ecology, are overshadowed by a deity-emphasized moral point that could be better made without relying upon a deity at all.

Yet, having said all that, *Pennterra* is definitely worth reading, more so than most books. ▶

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*I. E. Moudet, Jr. is the author of The Fires of Paratime, The Forever Hero Trilogy, and other novels. He lives in Oakton, Virginia*

## Drowning in the Alien

### Mary Gentle's *Golden Witchbreed* and *Ancient Light* Considered as a Single Novel

reviewed by Amy Thomson

I've always thought the best thing about sf is the rare and wonderful frisson that comes from an encounter with the Alien. I find it most often in works of cultural sf, books like Frank Herbert's *Dune*, *Courtesy Ride* by Donald M. Kingsbury, and Le Guin's novels *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *Always Coming Home*. These works lift the readers away from their safe, familiar cultural moorings, and leave them awash in the breadth and sweep of an alien culture based on alien assumptions and conditions.

Unfortunately, such books are few and far between. Generally they are masterworks by writers working at the peak of their craft. Oftentimes they are not immediate popular successes, but with patience and support from the publishers, build into steady, lucrative backlist books with a devoted following.

Mary Gentle's Orthean novels *Golden Witchbreed* and *Ancient Light* are exemplars of this type of cultural science fiction. Gentle creates a vibrant, complex alien culture, made up of humanoid aliens that are deceptively human-like, but possess some very deep and important differences. Ortheans are more intensely social than humans, and have very little sense of personal privacy. Orthean children do not become male or female until they are nearly adult. There are other deep and important differences, but one of the delights of the Orthean Diad is the slow unraveling of these and other differences and their influence on the vibrant cultures of Orthe, so I will let readers make their own discoveries.

In *Golden Witchbreed*, Lynne deLisle Christie, an envoy of Earth's Dominion, is charged with evaluating Orthe's readiness for further alien contact. She soon finds herself up to her neck in Orthean intrigue. She is caught in a deadly fight between the factions that favor further contact and trade with Earth, and those who fear that Christie is a member of the lost *Golden Witchbreed* race come again to destroy their world. The reader becomes enmeshed in the uncertain and engrossing machinations of alien politics, and is drawn ever deeper into the mysteries of Orthean Culture.

In *Ancient Light*, Lynn Christie returns to Orthe after an absence of ten years. She is now employed by a Pan-Oceanic, a multi-corporate company looking for the secret to the lost *Witchbreed* race's technol-

ogy. Alliances have shifted, friends have died or changed, and once again, nothing is as it seems on Orthe. Christie is caught between her loyalty to Orthe and her desire to keep the Company she works for from wreaking cultural havoc. The plot of *Ancient Light* is complex, full of intrigue, and contains some very nasty surprises.

*Golden Witchbreed* and *Ancient Light* are, in actuality, two volumes that comprise one extremely large and complex novel. The two novels are tightly interdependent, and together make up a larger, more powerful work. It is important to re-read *Golden Witchbreed* before embarking on *Ancient Light*, in order to appreciate the two works fully.

The Orthean Diad may not become a commercially popular work in America. It fails to pander to American cultural assumptions of moral certainty and simple reassuring endings. Lassie doesn't come home in this work, instead, she finds herself in a strange land where she learns bitter and painful lessons. Gentle keeps the reader always a little off balance, and a little uncertain. Reading *Golden Witchbreed* and *Ancient Light* is like being lost in a foreign land. An overwhelming deluge of detail creates a sense of the alien in these two books—from the sudden flicker of a nictating membrane sliding across an alien eye, and the difference in the way that light gleams off of an alien skin, to the sudden discovery of a millennia-old road that is still in perfect condition—all of it significant, all of it vividly portrayed. As a result, the book requires intense concentration, and patience on the part of the reader, as well as a willingness to be a little lost. Unfortunately, most readers in today's popularized of market always want to keep one foot on the bottom when swimming in alien seas. Orthe may prove to be too deep to be widely popular.

Still, the Orthean Diad definitely deserves a place in the pantheon of classic science fiction. Whether it will achieve its rightful place here in America depends on a devoted and perceptive readership. Hopefully *Golden Witchbreed* and *Ancient Light* will find a niche in the backlist. In case they don't, buy two copies, one to keep and one to lend. But lend them only to people who aren't afraid of swimming the deep waters of alien seas. ▶

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*Amy Thomson lives in Seattle, Washington*

# Screed

(Letters of Comment)

Patrick Nielsen Hayden, New York, New York

A number of relatively harmless errors of fact mark the editorial in your June issue. For instance, Corliss is not the only remaining US convention specifically for fanzine fans; there have been and are others, such as Ditto, and moreover the cast of your sentence implies that once there were many, which have now dwindled down to one. Actually, Corliss and similar conventions are a new thing, designed specifically to remedy the fact that many hardcore fanzine fans feel increasingly alienated from more diffuse gatherings such as Worldcon, yet still want an annual gathering at which they can easily meet large numbers of their friends.

Similarly, it's a serious overstatement to assert that "trufans now do not recognize any publication that is for the most part about science fiction as a fanzine." I think you'd find that most "trufans" consider the word fanzine to comfortably include publications such as *The Metaphysical Review* and *ASFR*. It is true, however, that when we say "fanzine fandom" we are describing a group of people who are at best only marginally interested in Prodom and the economic and critical politics thereof—which is very different from saying they're hostile to sf. And whether this means that the gestalt of a Corliss can fairly be described as "a proud and lonely togetherness" is another question altogether. I'd say that was the sort of snappy remark which, coming from a "trufan," would conceivably be funny, coming from the *NYRFSF*, it seems a mite arch. An identical comment could be made by any "trufan" about the focussed agendas of, say, *Sercon*, *Readercon*, or *World Fantasy*; and that comment, in context, would similarly smack of the uncomfortable outsider's pique.

I must make one other correction. My original design for the *New York Review of Science Fiction* does not, contrary to your June editorial, particularly reflect my "opinions as to how [a fanzine] ought to look." Of course everything one does can be said to "reflect" everything else, but getting down to particulars I must insist that my opinions about fanzine design are complex, situational, no doubt boring to non-fanzine-fans, and quite irrelevant to the considerations I put into the *NYRFSF*'s original design. That PageMaker template "reflects" my opinion about how a somewhat fanish semi-pro reviewazine produced by this particular group of people ought to look. Its execution, both in my hands and in Gordon Van Gelder's, has been heavily influenced by other factors such as the availability of particular fonts—and of time. But "how fanzines ought to look"? Ye wot not what issues you conjure.

John J. Pierce, Bloomfield, NJ:

Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* was indeed polemical. So were Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, H. G. Wells' *Things to Come*, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, and any number of other works that come to mind. Their common denominators are a sense that there is only one Truth, which is expressed by righteous heroes or heroines, and only one pervasive evil, as personified by Chinese opera villains who are (figuratively, or sometimes literally) shot down like clay pigeons in an amusement arcade.

It is suggested that male chauvinists could benefit from reading *The Female Man*. I find this about as plausible as a capitalist being converted by *Waiting for Lefty*, or a racist by *Sweet Sweetback's Bad-Ass Song*. The common message of such works is that the only "moral" thing a member of the "oppressor" class can do is drop dead. Several years prior to *The Female Man*, Russ herself wrote of the fallacy of trying to "make people more thoughtful, decent, honest, sympathetic, brave (and in general more virtuous) by calling them the worst names you can think of." Perhaps she has changed her mind; more likely she wrote *The Female Man* to rally women, rather than convert men—that is the nature of polemical fiction: to preach to the converted, and those ripe for conversion. Polemical fiction may or may not also be of literary value, and different readers may or may not recognize it on that level, depending on their ideology—but that is true of all examples of that type, not merely of feminist fiction.

For the record, works of feminist sf that I personally regard as 22 *The New York Review of Science Fiction*

going beyond polemics, and as therefore being more likely to have an impact on men, include Russ' own "Soul," Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean*, Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* and, yes, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (which, incidentally, offers a far more plausible scenario for the masculinist counter-revolution than Elgin's novel—mainstream sf does sometimes beat genre sf). James Tiptree (Alice Sheldon), Jr., could make even polemics an art with "Houston, Houston, Do You Read," although I think "The Women Men Don't See" was a better story. (I won't get into the latest feminist critique of the idea of "plot," except to point out that basking a cake is as linear a process as throwing a spear, and that goal-directed activity is behavior pattern common to both sexes, regardless of the goals.) (No, I don't know how to make a cake, but I can't throw a spear, either.)

Fred Harris, Hollywood, California:

I noted your review in *NYRFSF*, issue two, on L. Ron Hubbard's *Final Blackout* and wanted to comment. First your statement about *FB* not being on anyone's list of classics for decades is incorrect. It was, a few years ago, on the Garland Press classics list. When that edition was consumed, Author Services Inc., literary agents for L. Ron Hubbard, withheld rights for further re-release, despite many offers, as negotiations had already been concluded with Bridge Publications for their edition. It's moot though; no one would seriously argue the sf classic status of *Final Blackout*.

Secondly, you say you reread it for the first time since you were fourteen, "to see what is there now." Dear David, what is there now is what has always been (same words, same sentences, of course), but perhaps what has changed is that you are no longer fourteen. The passage of time after our teen years gives us all the opportunity to be exposed to demands to compromise—to "get along with the world as it is"—and never mind the high ideals and clear-cut ethics of our youth. Never mind the idea that one person CANNOT make a difference; a crucial difference.

What I probably like best about L. Ron Hubbard's fiction work is the inspiration of that uncompromising, undaunted image—The Lieutenant, or Jonnie Tyler from *Battlefield Earth*—the one which would be sophisticated try to deny, explaining that there is really no black and white, only shades of helpless gray. They never quite successfully hide from it though—that bold image of what, perhaps, we all SHOULD be a little more of.

Happily, like so many fans, my heart still races when I pick up *The Lieutenant's* uncompromising story.

Rebecca Ore, Critz, VA

Regarding *The Essential C. S. Lewis*, I've been thinking about religion and fantasy, the tension between Lewis's views and the dream of a secular progress found in Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, say. Seems like one of the philosophical bases for fantasy is that this world, down to the finest details, is a metaphor or shadow of a higher reality. Likewise, one of the bases for science fiction is the idea that what we (or any entity, or all entities collectively) can know is the real world. The fantasy and near-fantasy that most appeals to me tends to come from writers with some religious sensibilities or a more trans-rational orientation (if I'm reading Fritz Leiber correctly). I've been more tempted by religion than actually committed to it, but feel that Lewis best presents the case for his particular viewpoint with its benefits and drawbacks to a writer.

I hope at least half of the reading list recommenders veer into non-sfal books. I'm finding the recommendations out of field more interesting than the ones of other sf—we all sort of know the field, but often don't know all the research texts.

My life seems to move in spirals—you guys started with *The Quest?* The editor(s)? There were the first NY poetry magazine editors to encourage me if the magazine was still called *The Quest* in 1988 (before I enrolled in General Studies). I stopped sending things to *The Quest* when I started publishing in various St. Mark's Poetry Project projects. Oh, the paths not taken.

# Work in Progress

A Bibliographic Checklist of First Editions, by L. W. Currey

Draft: Revised 10/88

## KATHERINE ANNE MacLEAN

b. 1925

**COSMIC CHECKMATE.** *New York: Ace Books, Inc., [1962].*  
Wrappers. No statement of printing on copyright page. *Ace Double F-149* (40¢). With CHARLES V. DeVET. Bound with KING OF THE FOURTH PLANET by Robert Moore Williams. Expanded as SECOND GAME.

**DARK WING.** *New York: Atheneum, 1979.*  
First edition so stated on copyright page. With CARL WEST.

**THE DIPLOIDS.** *New York: Avon Book Division, [1962].*  
Wrappers. No statement of printing on copyright page. *An Avon Book G-1143* (50¢).

ALSO: *Boston: Gregg Press, 1981. First Printing, March 1981* on copyright page. First hardcover edition. Notes: (1) Text reproduced by photo offset from the 1962 Avon edition. (2) Not issued in dust jacket.

**THE MAN IN THE BIRD CAGE.** *New York: Ace Books, [1971].*  
Wrappers. No statement of printing on copyright page. *Ace Book 51800* (75¢).

**MISSING MAN.** *New York: Published by Berkeley Publishing Corporation Distributed by G. P. Putnam's Sons, [1975].*  
No statement of printing on copyright page.

**SECOND GAME.** *New York: DAW Books, Inc., [1981].*  
Wrappers. *First Printing, May 1981/1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9* on copyright page. *DAW: sf Books No. 435 UE 1620* (\$2.25). With CHARLES V. DeVET. Expansion of COSMIC CHECKMATE.

**TROUBLE WITH TREATIES.** (*Tacoma, Washington*): *The Lanthorne Press, 1975.*  
Wrappers. 200 numbered copies printed. No statement of printing on copyright page. With TOM CONDIT. Collected later in THE TROUBLE WITH YOU EARTH PEOPLE.

**THE TROUBLE WITH YOU EARTH PEOPLE.** *Virginia Beach: Starblaze Edition Donning, 1980.*  
Wrappers. No statement of printing on copyright page. *Starblaze Editions SB11* (\$4.95).

Draft: Revised 10/88

## ROBERT L. FORWARD

b.

**DRAGON'S EGG.** *New York: Ballantine Books, [1980].*  
Boards with cloth shelf back. First Edition: May 1980/  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 on copyright page.

**THE FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY.** *New York: Timescape Books Distributed by Simon and Schuster, [1984].*  
Two issues, priority of release as listed: (A) Wrappers. *Timescape books 0-671-49944-0* (\$7.95); (B) Boards with cloth shelf back. First printing (both issue same sheets) has code 1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2 / 1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2 Pbk. on copyright page.

**STARQUAKE.** *New York: Ballantine Books, [1985].*  
Boards with cloth shelf back. *First Edition, October 1985/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1* on copyright page.

### Miscellaneous information

**THE OWL,** by Robert Forward. *Pinnacle 1984.* Written by the son of Robert L. Forward.

Note: This is part of a series of bibliographic checklists of SF and fantasy writers that will update, revise, and expand the standard reference work *Science Fiction and Fantasy Authors* by L. W. Currey. For the organizational principles and methodology used in this and future lists, please refer to the introduction to that work. Knowledgeable persons are invited to communicate addenda and corrigenda directly to L. W. Currey, Elizabethtown, NY 12932.



## Workshops and Workshopping

It is summer. The days are hot and the fall books are nearly upon us, and as usual—in the days before Worldcon when not much is happening in the sf field—our thoughts turn to writing workshops. From the Clarions to Kansas, from Millford-by-the-Sea to Sycamore Hill, the game's afoot. Workshops have become perhaps the single most important pathway for new writers into sf and fantasy, replacing those legendary editorial conferences in New York offices. The workshops are probably most responsible for the generally higher level of acceptable prose at the bottom of the market. New writers of sf now write better at the start of their careers. What workshops do for more experienced writers is less clear (aside from the benefits of teaching for pay at some of them).

For the most part, the workshops and conferences are amusing, often intense, frequently educational. The competitive atmosphere of the workshop (which is not particularly harmful during it—everyone, pro or neo, wants to excel) very often translates into competition after the workshop.

Young/new writers often define their competition as members of their class group, the peer groups formed by workshops. This is one important factor in the newly intense focus on short fiction. The novel is too big and long and the competition takes years. Newer writers want recognition now.

To win the post-workshop sweepstakes, one has to get published and get an award nomination, or at least a lot of Nebula recommendations. SFWA's Nebula tally sheets allow you to recommend your peers publicly. This is a kind of special olympics for new writers seeking validation and actually makes it easier on them. They do not have to be anxious about learning to write well enough to be in competition with Joanna Russ or Fred Pohl or Chip Delany or John M. Ford or Gene Wolfe or Thomas M. Disch or Ursula K. Le Guin or whomever you would pick as top-notch.

Ironically, those writers have been silently defined out of the competition, into a kind of sf heaven where they live and write totally apart. The established masters are generally ignored by newer writers when short fiction awards are discussed or voted upon. An odd situation has developed over the past decade or so; many of the very best established writers get less attention than they deserve from the sf writing community for their generally excellent work, because of the generational/class nature of the competition fostered in the workshops.

We don't see any particular way to ameliorate this problem, except to express our feeling that all writers should be held to the highest standards, and that some forms of validation for newer writers are pernicious. They can keep a writer from raising his or her sights high enough, can keep a good and talented writer obsessed for years with competing with twenty or forty or even a hundred partly-formed talents from the same workshop background. And that's a trap.

—David G. Hartwell & the editors

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